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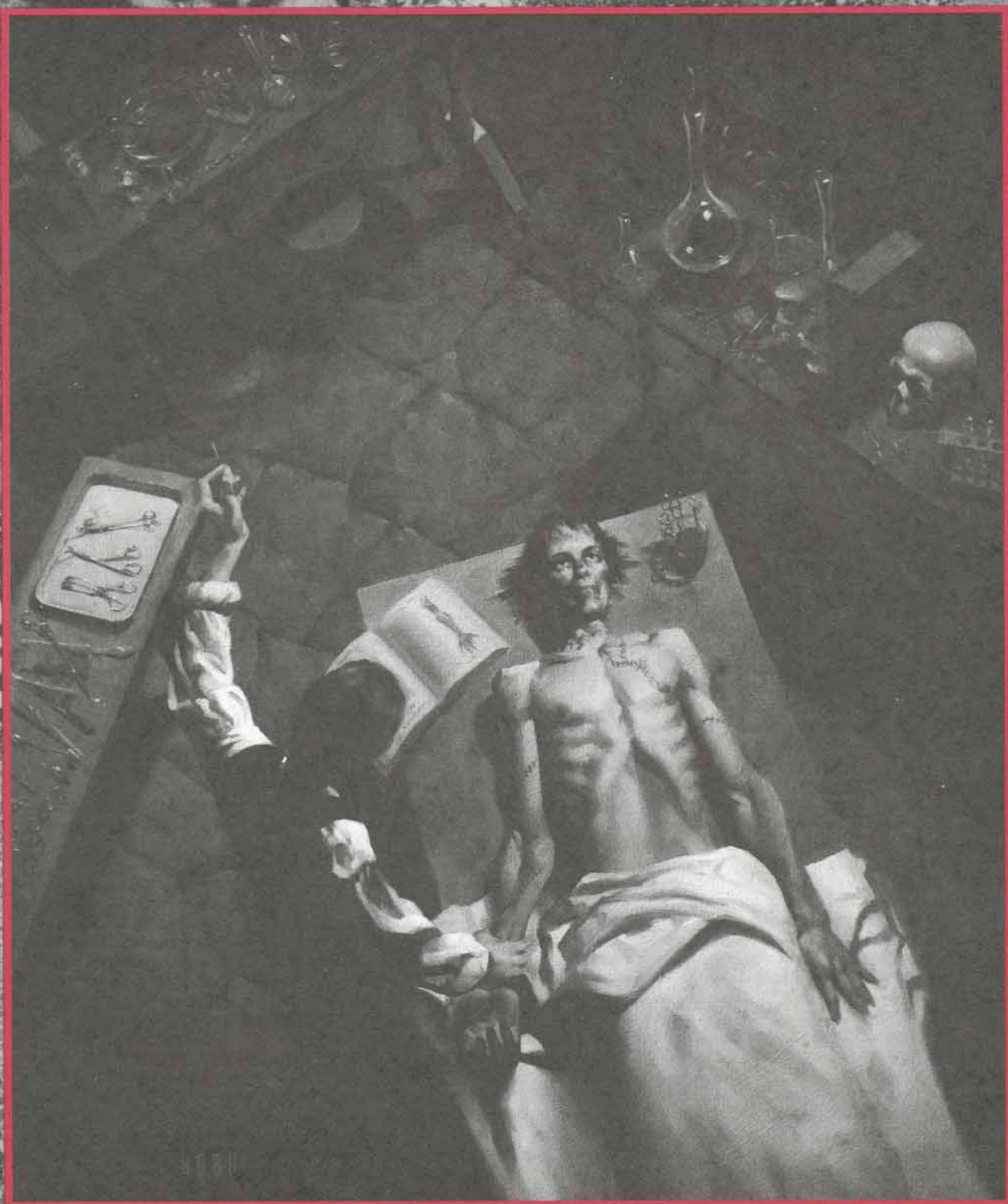
Ravenloft[®]

Official Game Accessory

Van Richten's Guide to the Created



VAN RICHTEN'S GUIDE TO THE CREATED



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INTRODUCTION



No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity. But I know none and therefore am no beast.

—William Shakespeare,
Richard III, I, ii

As I once again set pen to paper, I am reminded of my previous works. Each of my guidebooks has been a tribute to the brave souls who have fallen to the evils inhabiting this realm of mists. So many courageous folk have given their lives in an attempt to cleanse their homeland! So many innocents as well, including my own beloved wife and son, have been forever lost to the dark instruments of evil.

Thinking back upon the life's work thrust upon me by my own bitter losses, I am ever reminded of my responsibility to the dead, to the living, and to those yet to be born. Until it is my time to join my dear wife and son, I will continue fighting evil in all its myriad forms. Thus I freely renew my task in the hope that others will be spared the stark pain and loss I have witnessed and shared.

As I have previously written, knowledge is power. The work you now have before you, gentle reader, is a treatise touching on both madness and obsession. To those who would use this knowledge to feed the flames of their own obsessions, I offer a word of advice: Cast this work into your hearth fires instead.

I have come to believe that there is knowledge meant only for the gods themselves. The creation of life, the most sacred of all gifts, is surely knowledge of this type. Yet some have managed to "peer beneath the wrapping," as it were. Having glimpsed such wonders, they could not resist the temptation to seize the gift for themselves, whatever the cost. They cobble together bodies that should have long been laid to rest, or even substances that never knew life,

and create a living being in the most unnatural manner possible. The horrid results reflect the perversity of their methods.

I am speaking, of course, of *golems*. These unholy creatures are a mockery of the human (or demihuman) spirit and form. Not one—not even the rare golem fashioned in the shape of a child—can ever know goodness, purity, or light. They are the Created as we are the Born. But where the birth of a true child is surely the greatest blessing a parent could ever know, the creation of a golem is just as surely the most hideous curse, as the new "parent" will shortly discover.

Some of these so-called parents are wizards and priests, bending powerful magic to their task. I have heard tales of distant realms where *only* powerful magic can give life to the lifeless golem. I must stress to you, dear reader, that this is not the case in the lands with which I am familiar. Many creators—perhaps the most dangerous of all—are common folk driven by needs so twisted that all else dwindles to insignificance. The very land about us appears to give their obsession a form, to imbue their constructs with life while imparting no trace of humanity.

The same wanderers who claim that a golem is a purely magical construct would also suggest that it has no more intelligence than a rabid dog. Such ignorance may cost them their lives. While a few of golems might be dubbed "mindless killing machines," such creatures clearly are in the minority. In fact, the mind of a golem is most often keen. Unfortunately, it is always twisted.

Like natural parents, many creators of golems fashion their "children" in a familiar medium: flesh. As my knowledge of the Created comes mainly from experience with flesh golems, this treatise will focus primarily on creatures of this type.

However, if the accounts I have gathered can be trusted, it is possible in this world to construct a golem from virtually any material, from silver to straw. I will attempt to give what

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information I can on the destruction of other, less common forms of the Created as well. But I must first confess that what knowledge I possess in such areas is limited indeed.

I have often stressed the importance of understanding the mind of one's enemy. With the golem, the hunter must seek to understand not only the creature but also its creator. What would drive someone to meddle with life and death in such a foul manner? Obsession, yes. Madness, surely. But what else? Few of us are fortunate enough to ride life's course without claiming some sort of obsession or madness of our own. I myself might be considered obsessed by some. Over the many years of my fight I can think of any number of good people who have named me mad. Perhaps in some small way they are right. I acknowledge my life's work is an obsession to me. It has been one since the moment I held my wife, Ingrid, in my arms for the final time. Cradling her cold, still form against my chest; burying my face against her soft, perfumed hair; hearing the echo of her sparkling laughter in my mind; I swore vengeance on Baron Metus and all of his ilk: the vampires.

Over the years, I learned of still other evils: liches, ghosts, werebeasts, and more. My work and the obsession governing it broadened. I gained an understanding of golems only recently. In studying these creatures, I discovered something about the nature of evil, and about myself. Here, now, I freely confess to sitting by my hearth, in my home empty of wife and child these many years, and toying with the idea of creating a new family in their image. This idea crossed my mind for but a moment before I realized the true horror of what I contemplated. Yet, for that briefest of times, I understood the need—the utter loneliness and the aching void within—that could drive one to commit acts which were previously unthinkable.

Looking upon the darkness in my own soul, I realized we all must be ever vigilant. Dark forces lie in wait for the unwary. They listen for

our cries and call out to us in turn, offering to fulfill our deepest desires. They seek out the seeds of torment within us and strive to nurture them, bending them toward darkness rather than light. Every one of us, especially those who have dedicated themselves to fighting the evils in our land, must be on guard. The darkness calls to us from without, but it has no true power over us unless we allow it access to our hearts.

I consider these insights extremely valuable. No less valuable is the knowledge I have gained about golems. I have a dear friend to thank for both. But this information was acquired in the most difficult manner possible: through my friend's death. Indeed, *many* good people have perished to gain the information I shall impart throughout this work. I hope at least some few will be saved by this hard-won knowledge. As always, however, a would-be vanquisher of evil must remember this rule: Nothing in our world is absolute. Do not cling so hard to old beliefs and knowledge that you become blind to new evidence.

I shall now relate to you, dear reader, the tale of how I came to know of golems. It is my fervent wish that none of you will ever have to see the torment that accompanies the Created and their creators. However, if you are reading this at all, it is likely that the Created have already touched your life in some way, or may one day soon. I write in the hope that you too shall come to the same understanding and conviction as I: that all golems must be destroyed for our sake, and for theirs.



INTRODUCTION

A Doctor's Obsession

Antonin Madren was twenty-two years of age when we first met. He came to me full of the enthusiasm and imagined immortality felt by the young. He also possessed a finely developed wit and poetic sense. We became friends in no time. When he told me of his desire to practice medicine, I quickly agreed to take him on as a student.

Over the years our friendship grew. Antonin's dexterous hands and facile mind were honed by years of practice and learning, and he soon overtook me in surgical skill. When he was thirty, Antonin traveled to Martira Bay to begin his own practice. From then on we corresponded erratically through letters, commenting on each other's latest books.

Seven years ago, Antonin wrote to say he had lost his sister, his only living relative, to heart failure. In his letter, Antonin cursed his inability to save her. He claimed to have been too preoccupied to notice the medical clues signaling her heart problem.

Of course, I wrote back at once, and suggested that he was taking on far too much blame. These things sometimes happen. We doctors are not omnipotent; we cannot prevent every death. No letter came in response.

I did not hear from Antonin again until years later, when he arrived at my very doorstep. I remember it was raining steadily that night. It was not the dramatic maelstrom found in so many novels of late. There was no lightning, no thunder . . . only the relentless drumming of the rain. When I opened the door, I was shocked to find Antonin on the stoop. He wore only a shirt and trousers, and was soaked to the skin. Ushering him in, I immediately set the kettle on for tea and offered him a towel. Without so much as a word, he accepted my ministrations. It seemed the silence stretched between us forever, until finally it was interrupted by the cheery whistling of the teapot.

Returning with tea cozy in hand, I settled once more in front of Antonin. By now, I was seriously

concerned. His breathing was ragged, his eyes glassy, and there was about him the scent of fear. I know no better way to describe it. When I could stand the terrible silence no longer, I began to ask him questions. But he answered none of them.

Beginning to despair of ever reaching the man's once open mind, I quieted. It was then I noticed Antonin staring at the wooden model of a human heart I keep on my cluttered desk. Wordlessly, I rose and brought the model to my silent guest. It was as if I had touched flame to paper. Out poured the ragged, disoriented thoughts of what had once been one of the most disciplined minds I ever had the pleasure to know.

At this point, you must forgive me for being less than complete in my account. Antonin spoke of many things, none of them quite lucidly. But I will here record only those thoughts of direct relation to golems, only those rantings from which others might yet benefit. As to the other confessions he made to me that night, I shall respect his memory and confidence, and keep my silence. That said, here is our exchange, as best I can recall it. . . .

"I tried every sort of heart I could think to use," he told me. "Not even the lion's was strong enough."

"What did you try to do with them, Antonin?" I asked as gently as I could.

"None of them could help her. Every one failed my poor sister."

"Are you saying you placed other hearts in your sister's body?" I whispered. My stomach, so recently warmed with hot tea, turned to ice at the thought.

Nodding distractedly, Antonin continued. "Yes, yes. But nothing worked. Until I used the living heart. It worked. I took it from that poor urchin, and yet it still beat. I placed it within her, and it still beat. But not enough, not enough. So I found other pieces to use, other parts to replace. Until every organ, every appendage, was functional."

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Here Antonin paused, looking up from the wooden heart he still clutched to his breast. "Her eyes opened, Van Richten. And she smiled at me. At me."

When Antonin smiled I knew he was mad. Through my tears I asked him to continue.

"But it wasn't my sweet sister after all. She was so different, not at all herself. One day I arrived home to find all the crockery smashed. A week later I awoke with her hands about my neck, strangling my life away."

Tears had replaced his earlier smile, and we cried together as he continued. "I hit her. The mockery of my sister. Again and again I hit her. When it was over, I buried her. But the next night I again awoke to find her choking the life from me. That is when I fled."

"Then you have escaped your creation, Antonin?" I asked. The uncertainty in my voice stemmed from the madness still in Antonin's pale face.

"Oh, no. That isn't ever possible. I just keep moving. When I stop, she will find me again. She tells me so every day and night, inside my very head. She speaks of how she wishes to strangle me."

Rising slowly, Antonin straightened his tie and smoothed his pants. "I shall be leaving you now, doctor. She says she is near, and I have no reason to doubt my sister."

"But surely if you stay we can destroy her!" I cried. "I do have some small measure of experience with such things."

"Not with golems, doctor. She is not truly alive, and thus she cannot truly die. She is unstoppable, even by you."

Turning, Antonin headed to the door. Looking back at me, he tossed a small journal to the carpet. "You are the only person I could trust to read this, the only one who would not be tempted to follow the path laid out in this book and construct an abomination as I did. Should you ever run into that creature or others like her, use this information in your defense. The man who gave me this book is dead now. Killed by his own creation, as surely as I will be killed by my . . . sister."

With that, Antonin left me. Several weeks later I learned he was strangled to death in a small inn some two days south of my home. Although Antonin succumbed to madness, he did manage to bring me the knowledge I needed to begin hunting down the Created.

In the pages that follow, I will attempt to put forth all that I have learned of the Created. I have gathered this knowledge from Antonin's journal, my own research, and my own experiences. It is my sincerest hope you will come to discern that the monsters and their creators are both, in some sense, victims. Should you ever confront a golem, perhaps this realization will aid you.

I say this, of course, so that you might better understand your foe. Never should such empathy keep you from using all means at your disposal to destroy it. For the Created are indeed monsters, despite their vaguely human appearance. And they are enemies to be feared. Golems do not view life and death as you or I do; they cannot share our joys and fears. Should you ever be so unfortunate as to fight a golem, do not rejoice too swiftly upon slaying it. You must be prepared to become acquainted with true horror as your victim rises again and again from its supposed death. It will take all your resources, and perhaps more, to free the world of just one of these unholy menaces.

Editor's Note: Throughout this text, game applications of Dr. Van Richten's theories appear in gray boxes, like this one. Ideally, only the *Dungeon Master*™ (DM™) will read the material contained in these blocks; players should gain such information through their characters' experiences. Likewise, the appendix is meant strictly for the DM's eyes.

Chapter I: ASSEMBLY



Wonderful news today! Last month I wrote of the beautiful young woman, Safira, who for several weeks had been battling a terrible case of pneumonia. After my brief visit yesterday, it seems she succumbed to her illness. Poor dear. But now my own child will have such a sweet, pretty face, and hair as soft as silk. It won't be long before my happiness is complete!

I must make haste. I have a funeral to attend. And then I must make my preparations for a more private honoring of the dead.

—From the journal of Thor Hessen

In this chapter I shall explain the challenges faced by a madman who desires to construct a golem's body. I use the term "madman"

expressly, for one of the most fearful aspects of a golem's construction is the creator himself. As I noted in the introduction, it seems that virtually any twisted personality can create a unique and intelligent golem in these misty lands, from a farmer to a scientist. All that seem truly necessary are an obsessive, driving need or desire and the ability to fashion the physical body.

Most golems are made of flesh. Due to the predominance of flesh golems among the Created, I will give a proportionately large amount of space to discussing the particular requirements of constructing a flesh golem's body.

It is conceivable, however, that a golem could be fashioned from almost any material. Of course, certain materials such as paper or ice would presumably be too unstable to form a lasting body. Furthermore, others such as diamonds and rubies would be difficult to acquire in large quantities, making their use in a golem unlikely. Even if one could acquire enough of such rare materials, they would be difficult to form into bodies. Still, anything is possible given a creator with the appropriate resources and skills.

Procuring Materials

Gathering the materials required for a golem's construction can be a difficult, expensive, and even dangerous prospect for the would-be creator. It can also be time-consuming, depending on the material chosen.

A flesh golem typically requires no fewer than six corpses: one for each limb, one for the head and torso, and another for the brain. (I shall present my theory on why this is so in Chapter II.) These parts for flesh golems must be gathered rather quickly, lest the tissue reach a state of decay too advanced for use.

A colleague once wrote to me for my opinion on a rather demented little taxidermist, who had to be kept under lock and key to prevent him from gathering up the bodies of dead animals and stitching together hybrids. Apparently, the man had succeeded in creating at least a few animal golems before he was stopped. Fortunately, the taxidermist was given to long periods of catatonia. A catatonic individual stares into space for hours, even days on end, lost to the world around him. Thus, this man would gather together most of the necessary materials only to find himself, days later, sitting amongst the stench and gore of rotting, unusable corpses.

Builders of flesh golems who have an ice cold place available to store bodies and body parts have more temporal leeway than most. Deep snow, ice caverns, even large ice boxes may be used to prevent or slow decomposition. While searching for a flesh golem south of Viaki, I discovered a frozen lake with no fewer than three bodies wrapped in canvas and tied to the nearby dock. By stationing myself at the lake, I discovered the identity of the golem's creator.

Other materials can be gathered more slowly with little or no consequence, as decomposition is not an issue with metal, stone, and the like. But do not think constructing any form of golem body to be easy. Far from it. Although

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TABLE 1: Assembly Time and Cost

	Flesh	Bone	Clay	Glass	Metal	Stone	Straw	Wood
<i>Preparation time</i>	6 wks	1 mth	3 wks	3 mths	2 mths	2 mths	2 wks	1 mth
<i>Assembly time</i>	2 wks	1 mth	1 wk	3 mths	2 mths	1 mth	1 wk	1 mth
<i>Cost of assembly (gp)</i>	50,000	35,000	65,000	125,000	100,000	80,000	100	20,000

Table Notes

Preparation time is the period spent gathering materials and equipment. It does not include the many months or years of planning and research that some creators perform beforehand.

Time of assembly represents the actual number of hours the creator spends physically putting his creation together. (When added to preparation time, this equals the "construction time" presented in the *Monstrous Manual*.) In general, this is the minimum time required to achieve satisfactory results. When an obsessive creator is working toward perfection, additional time may be devoted to the task.

Cost of assembly includes cash expenditures for labor and incidental expenses, as well as the basic cost of materials and equipment needed. Repeated from the *Monstrous Manual*, these figures should be viewed as basic guidelines for RAVENLOFT® campaigns. As materials vary, so do costs (a stone golem, for example, would cost more if carved from granite than from sandstone). Other factors also affect cost. In general, DMs should let the story at hand determine how much a creator spends—and, if the creator is poor, determine how that person obtains those funds. Bear in mind that a golem created through obsession (as opposed to traditional magic) may cost far less than amounts shown; the creator serves as the craftsman. On the other hand, even a master craftsman might hire others for incidental or gritty tasks, so that he or she can focus on the "art." Remember too that those

who are obsessed with creating life often spend everything they have to achieve their goal—be they a pauper or a prince.

Craftsmanship

Table 1 reflects the minimum investment for an "average" golem. (Base statistics for such golems are presented in Chapters III and IV.) A creator who invests more time and money—or less—can create golems of varying quality, as outlined below. These variations help DMs tailor a particular golem to the needs of their campaigns. For example, a poorly constructed golem may be just the foe for an inexperienced party.

Excellent: If a creator invests twice the usual creation time and expense, the golem gains +1 to physical attributes and an additional 2d3 points to the golem's Charisma.

Good: If a creator invests 50% more resources and time, the golem gains +1 to two of its physical statistics (DM's choice) and an additional 1d3 points of Charisma.

Average: No bonuses or penalties apply.

Poor: If the time and cost are reduced by 25%, the golem suffers a -1 penalty to all physical attributes. Further, its Charisma drops 1d3 points.

Shoddy: If the time and cost are reduced by 50%, the golem suffers a -2 penalty to all physical attributes, and its Charisma drops 2d3 points.

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some creators do not spend adequate time assembling their grotesque progeny and undoubtedly have poor results, most creators labor long and hard, using all resources at hand to “perfect” their dread creations.

Fleshy Concerns

Constructing a flesh golem presents its own unique challenges. As noted, no single body will do: six is the minimum number required. (Each arm, each leg, the trunk plus head, and the brain must all be taken from different corpses, though still more bodies can be harvested for smaller parts.) Furthermore, the flesh must be relatively fresh. Despite such requirements, flesh is by far the most common material used in the construction of golems.

Why are flesh golems predominant? Perhaps this is due to the natural proclivity of flesh to contain and shelter intelligent life. Unlike the other materials discussed so far, flesh is innately accommodating to the life force. Thus, for the very same reason you and I are not made from inanimate wood, glass, or metal, the animating force of the golem most readily enters a vessel crafted of once-animate flesh. Perhaps due to the very nature of flesh, far more would-be creators of flesh golems succeed at their grisly task than the would-be creators of other forms of the Created.

For the creator, flesh is also readily available, at least for those willing to rob the graves of the newly dead (or to murder the living). Flesh is soft and thus relatively easy to stitch together. The golem’s patchwork of skin does not heal well when pieced together, however. The fusing of flesh in a golem serves to emphasize the bond, resulting in hideous, raised scars and conspicuous traces of stitching.

Such obvious deformities, along with the mismatched body parts, are a blessing to all who wish to hunt golems; they allow us to know the creature for what it truly is. When one hunts a vampire or werewolf, for example, it possible

to be a guest in the creature’s very home and fail to recognize the prey. But there is no worry of attending a gathering hosted by a golem and not realizing who—or what—that person is! No, the true nature of these hideously formed beings is always instantly recognizable.

Although the tissue mass that constitutes a flesh golem is hideous, it is amazingly functional. These golems regenerate at an extraordinary rate. In short, the flesh heals many times faster than it did while sheathing other bodies (see Chapter III for details).

At this point in our discussion, we must ask ourselves several questions. When selecting body parts for inclusion, how much tissue deterioration and decay is acceptable before the body part becomes too decayed for use? Can pieces of any body be used? For example, can animal or monster parts be used in the assembly of the body?

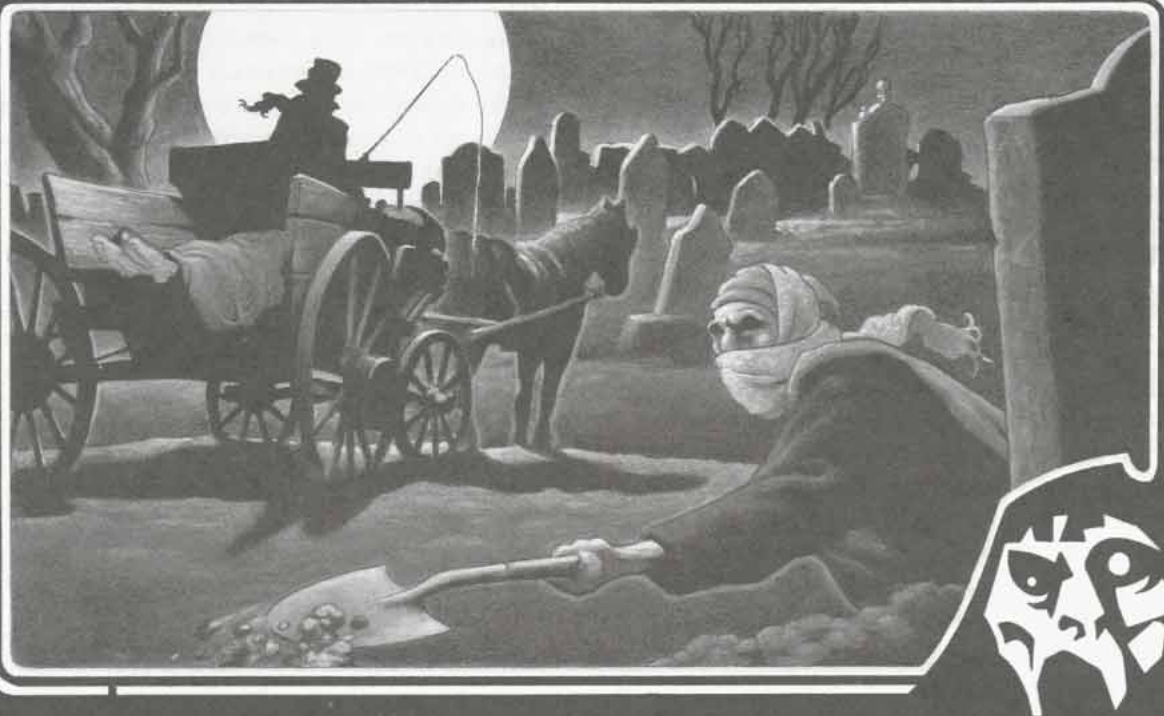
Before we proceed to examine these horrible yet medically fascinating issues, I must first warn more sensitive readers that the material next covered is of necessity rather visceral. If the following material disturbs or upsets, I apologize. Still, we must not allow faintheartedness to keep us from knowledge.

Climate and Decay

In order for a body part to be useful in the construction of a flesh golem, the ligaments, tendons, and the like must not yet have rotted to the degree that they rip and tear when manipulated. Although a flesh golem’s body is extremely powerful and resilient once it is animate, during construction the opposite is true. The creator must take great care to stitch the muscles, tendons, and ligaments of one body part to the corresponding muscles, tendons, and ligaments of its partner. This work is both arduous and exacting.

Due to the stitching and great amount of manipulation the body parts must withstand, I estimate that, given average conditions, body parts must be utilized within one week of death.

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Beyond that period, the part may have degraded to uselessness. Note that this is a very general estimate, and conditions are rarely "average." Several factors can affect the exact speed of decay. The most important are temperature and moisture.

The colder the temperature at which a body is kept, the longer the process of decay is kept at bay. Obviously, the reverse is also true; the warmer the temperature, the swifter the decay. Moisture in the air, or humidity, also affects the rate of decomposition. The higher the humidity, the more rapid the rotting. However, humidity levels are secondary in importance to temperature.

In an environment well below freezing, it is possible for a corpse to remain in virtually pristine condition for an indefinite period of time, untouched by even the slightest hint of decay. This is why a body found during a spring thaw at a northerly lake often appears to have died only recently, when in fact the victim has been frozen

for months. Of course, the process of decay can never be reversed, and any decay that occurred before the body was frozen will still be in evidence. Further, once the body part is exposed to warmer temperatures, decay continues.

What if the temperature is cool but not below freezing? In this case, or when the air is very dry, body parts can remain intact for quite some time. They do continue to decay, but the process is slowed. Under such conditions, it would seem reasonable that body parts would remain usable for perhaps as many as two weeks, although such parts would surely undergo some degradation.

When the air is warm but not hot—that is, in temperatures humans find most comfortable—flesh decays steadily. I venture to say that a body part would become useless after a period of perhaps nine days in such a temperate environment. If, however, conditions were particularly moist but not excessively hot (or

I had been called to a small village in my homeland of Darkon. The local residents were terrified that a plague of vampires was about to be called down upon them. Quaking with fear, the village leaders brought me to the hamlet's tiny graveyard. Along with the gray light, twisted trees, and chipped stone markers, freshly turned earth greeted my eyes. A trio of graves had been disturbed, with the ground hastily heaped back into place.

"You see, good doctor?" the village elder cried. He was a stooped and slender man some ninety-odd years old, and his voice cracked with fear and age. "We laid these three young men in the ground only days ago, but they do not rest. How can we protect ourselves?"

Informing him that I must investigate further before drawing any conclusions, I asked my companions, Gildred and Havaland—the famed Strickmund brothers—to aid me in searching the grave sites. It seemed odd to me that such a small village (of no more than fifty individuals) would suffer so many deaths at once.

Listening to the sodden shoveling sounds and grunts of effort of the brothers Strickmund laboring at the graves, I determined to delve further into the circumstances surrounding the three deaths.

"Did these young men die of some sudden disease, perhaps a wasting sickness or an illness of the blood?" I inquired of the elders present. The victims of a vampire's foul ministrations often appear to die in such a manner, before rising as minions of evil but a few nights later.

"No, Dr. Van Richten," the village leader replied, his aged hands shaking with sorrow and fear. "That is why we took no precautions with the lads' bodies. It was simply an accident that caused their deaths, just a terrible accident."

"I have found that accidents are not always what they first appear to be," I responded, as gently as possible. "Please tell me more about the circumstances. . . ."

—From the journal of Dr. Van Richten

vice versa), decay would set in at a faster rate than under so-called "average" conditions. In such climates, flesh might become unusable in perhaps as few as five or six days. (This explains why the villagers living near the Great Falls wait no more than one day before burying their dead. Through experience, these villagers know that warm, moist air cause bodies to decompose quite rapidly, just as meat becomes rancid far more rapidly in the summer than in the winter.)

Under the most extreme conditions of damp heat, such as a jungle environment, decay sets in with amazing speed. If you ever visit the jungles of Sri Raji, note the rich loam of the earth, the quickly rotting logs, the amazing variety and number of insects. All are signs of both the speed and thoroughness with which death brings decay in such a clime. It would seem difficult in the extreme to construct a golem under such conditions, but would-be creators are fantastically resourceful. At best, I would imagine the creator to have only two or three days' leeway before the flesh so degrades as to become nonviable.

There is an interesting side note on humidity and its effects on decomposition. When exposed to an extremely raw, arid climate, a corpse may not decompose in the normal manner. I observed this effect myself while journeying across a desert. My fellows and I, riding sturdy mules, were attempting to reach the lair of a lich whose sanctuary was supposedly hidden beneath the dust and sand. The wind was particularly fierce one day, forcing us to stop and make camp early. That night, I feared both my tent and my person would be ripped to shreds by the driving storm, or at the least that I would be permanently deafened by the wind's titanic roar!

Fortunately my fears proved groundless. The tents held, as did my ears. In the morning we emerged, ready to set off once again. As I sipped cool water in a vain attempt to wash the gritty tang from my mouth, our guide, Atrawn, ran up to me. He dragged me over the facing

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dune, nearly causing to me to spill my water skin in his urgency.

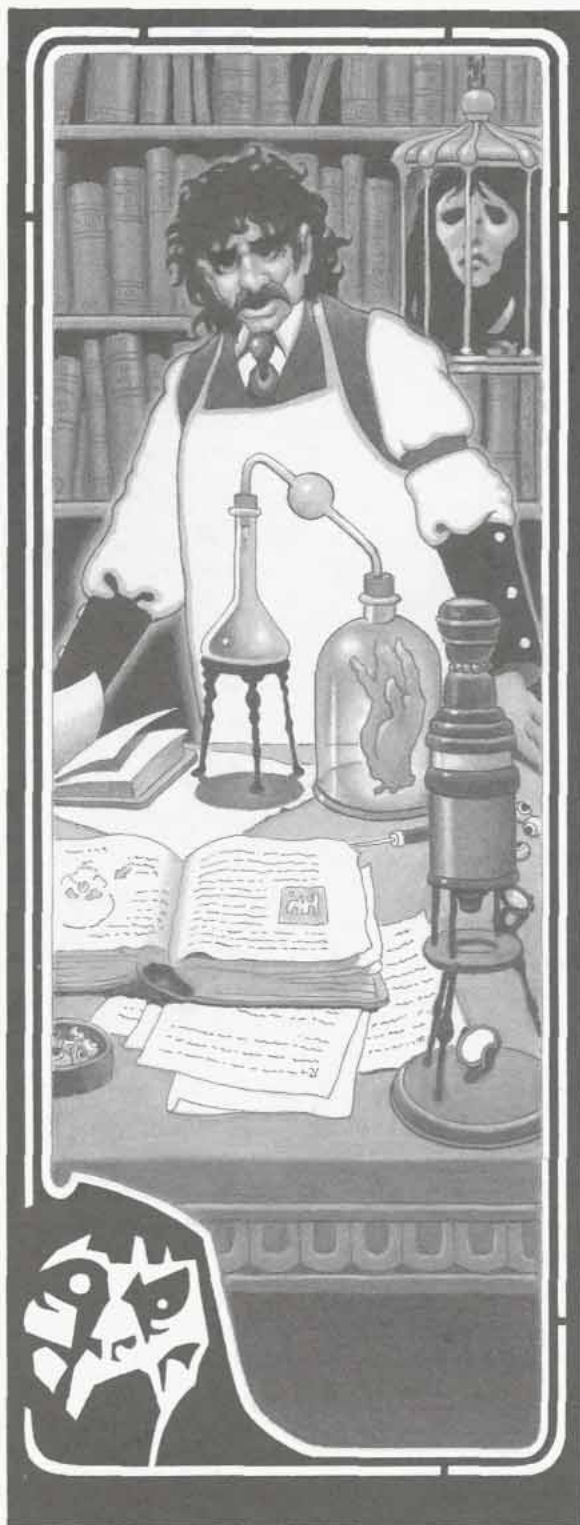
He pointed to a small group of bodies, which had been invisible previously. Knowing the storm must have uncovered the corpses, I began an examination. It was as if all the moisture in the bodies had been drawn out. The dark skin was still wrapped firmly about the bones, but it was extremely thin and wrinkled. Along the necks, legs, and arms I could easily make out tendons, jutting stiffly outward from the shrunk forms. There was no odor of death or decay about the bodies, only the clean, warm smell of the desert.

By this point in my examination, my companions had gathered around as well. Torenor the dwarf carefully plucked a trinket from one of the bodies, wondering aloud if it was valuable. Glancing at the silver and onyx earring, I was startled to see it was a *durasha*, an item used by a certain nomadic tribe as a ward against evil spirits. However, the tribe had died off years ago, killed by rivals.

From both the condition of the corpses and the presence of the *durasha*, I estimated the bodies to have been at least a century dead. Apparently, the sere climate caused the moisture to disappear so quickly from the tissue that no true decay could set in. It would follow that similarly desiccated parts could be used in the construction of a golem. Despite this possibility, I have never heard of such a creature.

I'd like to close this section with a cautionary note. Do not make the mistake of assuming that because you are in a hot and humid region, the would-be creator will be unable to finish his work. Climatic limitations can be circumvented; as always, the truly obsessed will find a way if any chance of success exists, no matter how remote.

A colleague of mine once reported stumbling across a strange room located deep beneath the earth. Within the chamber, a gold miner had begun collecting and storing body parts in preparation for construction of a golem. The miner's story was one of loneliness and



... Clearly my inquiry about the three youth's deaths caused my hosts great discomfort. The elders shook their heads in sorrow and confusion. An old woman stood among them, pulling her heavy woolen shawl closer about her frail shoulders. It was she who gave the only verbal response: "They were working on the new barn when it collapsed on top of them. We all worked fast as we could to get them out of there ... but there was naught we could do for the lads, poor things."

Clucking her tongue in sorrow, the woman, one Nelly by name, turned to stare at the ruined building just visible through the trees while Havaland and Gildred completed their excavation.

The villagers had been too terrified to search the graves themselves, so they were quite shocked to see the mangled forms lying uncovered within the newly re-opened graves. All three of the men had been young and powerfully built. Now though, each of the bodies was missing one limb.

Asking as delicately as I could under the circumstances, I confirmed that each man had been whole when buried. ...

—From the journal of Dr. Van Richten

rejection, and the man apparently longed for someone who wouldn't mock or shun him. It was fortunate for the man that my colleague discovered his chamber, for the rejection he would have ultimately faced from his golem would have been far worse than any he could possibly have conceived.

The chamber was reachable only by arduously crawling through a network of small caves that followed a tiny underground stream. Although the outside temperatures averaged over 100 degrees and the humidity was always high, the chamber itself was extremely cool due its depth and stone insulation. Thus, the

collected body parts remained quite fresh even though the first of the limbs' "donors" was almost a week dead.

Effects of Decay

I do not wish to imply that a week-old body part and one that is but hours dead are of equal value. The fresher part would be much more valuable from a creator's perspective. While a piece of flesh may be usable, it does not follow that it reflects "peak condition." When partially decayed materials are used in the construction of a golem, the creature's structural integrity is diminished. Further, if too many parts have degraded sufficiently, the creature as a whole may not be viable, no matter what the creator attempts.

Another possibility is that a member of the Created whose body contains partially decayed body parts is not as clever or powerful as a golem constructed with fresher parts. Presumably, any lessening of skills would be those relative to the defective body part or parts (e.g., a slightly rotted brain might create a less intelligent creature).

Indeed, I suspect that certain body parts—especially those upon which skills are based—might be more vulnerable to decay and damage than others. Eyes, brains, hearts, and other organs should become unusable at a faster rate due to their delicacy. Other, less delicate body parts—limbs, for example—would no doubt withstand greater abuse before they are rendered worthless.

A scientist with whom I am acquainted has suggested that the level of decay is not truly pertinent, save that a part must have enough structural integrity to hold together during the actual physical construction. I tend to dispute this idea; it makes little sense, given what we know of physiology. However, it is unwise to entirely rule out any possibility when dealing with the Created. Take this information, your own observations, and any other sources you can find and come to your own conclusions. It is your life at risk.

Nonhuman Body Parts

It is indeed possible for body parts from corpses of different races, and even different species, to be used in the creation of one golem. I myself was involved in the destruction of a particularly grotesque golem who appeared to have been constructed from no fewer than three different species. Its head and torso were human, but one of its arms was that of a brown bear, while its legs appeared to have been ogre limbs. It was a terribly disfigured monster, all out of proportion with itself, like a child's fanciful drawing come horribly to life.

What, if any, mental and emotional effect would this sort of merging have? That is a question which I shall explore later in this work. However, all my hypotheses and psychological postulations are as nothing to staring into the face of such a wretched being.

I speculate that only certain natural barriers would keep a creator from being able to cobble together a golem made from many different creatures. One obvious barrier is size. If the difference between two connecting body parts is too great, the creator cannot successfully stitch the parts together. Even if the stitching could be accomplished, a golem with, say, the body of a halfling and the arm of an ogre might have difficulty effectively using the outsized limb. In general, the supporting frame must be of sufficient size and strength to utilize its limbs. Some leeway may be assumed, however, due to the additional strength musculature appears to gain when reanimated as part of a golem construct. I shall delve further into the subject of odd parts—and the resulting physical attributes—in Chapter III, "Constructions of Flesh."

Here it is probably wise to mention the tragic creatures known as broken ones. Educated readers may believe these sad beings to be almost identical in nature to golems. While they do have certain similarities, this is not at all the case.

Broken ones are the tragic survivors of both scientific and magical experiments. Humans

once, their humanity has been inextricably mingled with the life force of animals. The shock of this transformation forever alters the wretched creatures. But there is an extremely important distinction between these beings and golems. Broken ones are alive. They do not die in the experiments, and thus the scientists and mages do not create new life in creating broken ones. Although terrible violation of the spirit occurs, no death is involved. This is a critical difference between golems and broken ones.

... At this point in the investigation, I realized no vampire was at work here. Someone, perhaps even one of the elders standing before me, was attempting to construct a flesh golem. Far from easing my mind, this discovery only caused my heart to race. For once a golem becomes functional, it can be even more difficult to destroy than the dreaded vampire!

Fortunately, in this instance we were able to stop the creator before he completed his dread child. That very evening, I and my two stolid companions stationed ourselves around the tiny graveyard. Sure enough, we caught the grave robber attempting to exhume yet another corpse. The man himself was crazed with desperation and need—what had brought him to such a state we will never know. When it became obvious he would be unable to make good his escape, the man drank from a small vial in his possession. Moments later he collapsed, a victim of the powerful poison contained therein, and the obsessions of his own warped mind.

As a doctor, I use all my humble skills and knowledge to fight death. Yet, standing in the bitter cold of that bleak cemetery, I knew this man's death was probably for the best. Had he completed his work—and I knew it would have been impossible to dissuade him—then he surely would have faced a more horrid demise at the hands of his own creation.

—From the journal of Dr. Van Richten

Body Parts and Decay

Uan Richten has introduced the subject of decay and its effect on a flesh golem. This topic is covered in greater detail below. Such information can be useful in creating a history for a flesh golem, as well as in “customizing” a particular monster by giving it limbs that have decayed almost to the point of uselessness. This mechanism is particularly useful to DMs who wish to create a weaker golem for low-level parties.

Stages of Decay

The condition of the specific parts used in the creation of a golem can affect the monster’s base statistics (see Chapter III for a list of these statistics). For purposes of determining decay, there are two categories of body parts: organs and limbs. Organs are delicate and more vulnerable to such deterioration.

Body parts undergo four stages as they decay: fresh, good, usable, and decayed. Brief descriptions of possible game effects for each stage are given below. These are guidelines for DMs, who may use them to “flesh out” physical details for a particular golem.

Fresh: Fresh body parts come from corpses that have been dead for only a brief period of time. No significant decay has occurred.

Good: Body parts in this group have begun the process of decay, especially soft organs. However, their general condition is still good, and game effects are minimal. For example, a golem with a tongue in “good” shape prior to its animation might exhibit slightly slurred speech, but no other impairment. The most prominent effect involves the brain. If a brain has deteriorated from fresh to good condition, the golem’s Intelligence score is decreased by 1 point.

Usable: Body parts in “usable” condition have truly begun to decay, and they will weaken the golem in some small way. This is particularly true if organs are involved. Some examples of the effect of using such parts during creation of the golem are as follows:

Eyes	Vision reduced to 50%
Limb	–1 to Dexterity, –1 to Strength
Brain	–3 to Intelligence
Feet	Movement reduced to 75%

Decayed: This flesh is in an advanced state of decay. Organs and other delicate tissues in this state cannot be used to construct a viable golem. It is sometimes possible to use other body parts in this state, but they produce an inferior golem. Examples of the effect of using such body parts during the creation of the golem are as follows:

Limb	–2 to Dexterity, –2 to Strength
Feet	Movement at 50%

Once body parts pass this final stage, they are far too putrid for use in a flesh golem, although a zombie golem or bone golem might be constructed successfully. Anyone viewing such a golem should immediately make a horror check due to the hideous appearance of the monster (DM’s option).

Climate and Decay

A body part’s rate of decay varies by climate. Table 2 defines six different “climates” by their heat and humidity levels: arctic, cool, temperate, moist, torrid, and desert. The effects of each climate on decay are outlined below.

Of course, not every body part is exposed to the elements. Some may be stored in a cool cellar or even frozen to slow or stop decay. Would-be creators of golems usually attempt to preserve body parts in the best condition possible.

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TABLE 2: Climatic Effects on Decay

Temperature ▼	Sere 0%–10%	Arid 11%–40%	Average 41%–60%	Humid 61%–80%	Very Humid 81%–100%
<i>Freezing</i> ≤ 32° F	Arctic	Arctic	Arctic	Arctic	Arctic
<i>Chill</i> 33°–60° F	Cool	Cool	Cool	Temperate	Moist
<i>Average</i> 61°–80° F	Cool	Temperate	Temperate	Moist	Torrid
<i>Hot</i> 81°+ F	Desert	Temperate	Moist	Torrid	Torrid

Arctic: Body parts kept below freezing will not decay further. If a fresh body part is frozen, it will still be fresh when it thaws. Likewise, if a body part was in usable condition when frozen, it will be in the same state when thawed. Decay will continue as soon as the part is exposed to temperatures above freezing.

Cool: Body parts that are stored in a cool environment decay at the following rate:

Fresh	Days 1–2
Good	Days 3–5
Usable	Days 6–10
Decayed	Days 11–14
Unusable	After Day 14

Temperate: The decay rate for flesh stored in a temperate environment is as follows:

Fresh	Day 1
Good	Days 2–4
Usable	Days 5–7
Decayed	Days 8–10
Unusable	After Day 10

Moist: Body parts exposed to a moist environment decay at the following rate:

Fresh	Day 1
Good	Day 2
Usable	Days 3–4
Decayed	Days 5–7
Unusable	After Day 7

Torrid: Body parts subjected to such conditions decay at the following rate:

Fresh	First 12 Hours
Good	13–36 Hours
Usable	36–72 Hours
Decayed	Day 3–Day 5
Unusable	After Day 5

Desert: When conditions are extremely dry and hot, bodies can become desiccated very rapidly. As Dr. Van Richten observed, the moisture is drawn out of the body so quickly it becomes mummified. In such cases, limbs and other visible parts are preserved indefinitely, and it is possible to use them in the creation of a golem. Such body parts are considered fresh. Note that this does not include organs, which are considered to be in a torrid environment for purposes of judging decay (see above).

Chapter II: ANIMATION



To see my Alyce sit up, brush her hair, and smile. How wonderful! But most wonderful of all, looking into those deep blue eyes, canted upwards in reminiscence of their elfin donor. What matter the puffy stitches beneath, the heaviness of the eyelids? My child, my Alyce is at last alive and whole!

Every night I raise a glass of the finest wine my cellars have to offer. It is a toast to the genius gifted me by the gods, allowing me to create life itself. Soon my old friends will humble themselves before me, and beg to have me as their teacher.

But they have already proven themselves unworthy by doubting my genius. Well, they shall soon doubt no more.

—From the journal of Thor Hessen

The “parents” of the blighted creatures called golems toy with a gift that most reserve for the gods: creating life. But how is such a thing possible? How can that which is dead or inanimate assume an existence that is not undeath, as we know it, but life? Although I am far from certain as to the exact nature of the process, I do feel qualified to put forth several theories on this subject.

I would advise the reader while perusing this chapter to maintain a certain amount of healthy skepticism, as well as an intellectual distance. In the first place, although these theories of mine have grown out of many hours of research and firsthand observation (mainly of flesh golems), they are but theories. And they are highly speculative theories at that.

Secondly, I am certain it is unwise to delve too deeply into this realm of knowledge. Although information is certainly necessary to combat the Created, I fear that even a person of good conscience and moral fiber might be somehow *changed* by gaining some knowledge of the creation of life, no matter how limited in scope.

From both a philosophical and emotional perspective, I have come to the decision that there is just some knowledge mortals are not meant to possess. Alas, if the world were as it *should* be, it would be very different indeed.

With those caveats in mind, we may proceed to my theories on the animating forces necessary to the creation of a golem.

The Source of Life

It is my firm belief that the force which animates a golem is not created per se.

Rather, it is a pre-existing spirit, drawn to the empty vessel that is the golem body, and then trapped within it. Such animating forces may be of two varieties: a dark spirit or a stolen life force. Both are horrid in their own way.

Dark Spirits

It has been postulated, by both myself and other theorists, that there are numerous evil “spirits” about in our world—not ghosts, mind you, but beings who have never truly been alive, who have never maintained a corporeal existence. A few scholars assert that such dark forces must hail from another realm entirely. I myself believe they are in some way a part of our land, just as we are, existing at the edge of our nightmares in a manner we cannot fully comprehend. It can be assumed, however, that these darkling spirits know neither life nor death as we understand it. And, unlike mortals, they do not have a cycle of life.

We can at best speculate on what such an existence might be like. However, it does not seem unreasonable to hypothesize that these evil, ethereal beings might experience the emotions of mortals as tangible qualities. We can further imagine that these creatures could be attracted by compellingly evil thoughts and deeds, especially when they are accompanied by intense desires.

When a powerful wizard performs a difficult magical working, or a priest pushes back

undead minions, he calls upon skill and faith, yes. But these acts also require great force of will and conviction. Further, an individual whose heart and mind burn with an all-consuming obsession might exhibit an equal intensity of will, if not a greater one. Such emotion might well attract a darkling spirit.

Imagine now that this warped individual were to focus his will toward the creation of life, and that he had properly constructed a body which could receive the darkling spirit. Under these circumstances, the creator might be able to trap the entity in that vessel. The spirit—thus mired within a corporeal form for the first time in its existence—might lack the capability to extricate itself. As the wizard who creates a powerful item of magic can attest, the bonds shaped by a strong will can be powerful indeed.

I shudder to think that creatures incapable of true death—that are utterly devoid of morality, pity, and sheer humanity—are even now inhabiting our land and walking among us.

The Stolen Life Force

To my great sorrow, I am certain the life force animating some flesh golems is stolen from those already living. All who fashion this type of creature must steal from the *dead*, of course, seizing their limbs and organs. But a few creators—and fortunately they are unusual—commit an even greater atrocity: They rob the living of their very identity.

I can say this terrible thing with certainty thanks to a long-time correspondence I have maintained with the Vistani wise woman, Cyrilla. Those of you who have read my earlier works may wonder that I have even one friend among the Vistani. It is true that I cannot help but find the Vistani, as a culture, loathsome. If not for the Vistani thieves who kidnapped my boy, Erasmus, he would never have come into the hands of the foul vampire Baron Metus.

Yet, over the years, I have come to the conclusion that one cannot condemn an individual for the failings of an entire culture.

While I abhor those who brought such personal grief to myself and my loved ones, I have managed to attain a level of respect and friendship with a few, individual Vistani. That stated, let us continue.

Although it is extremely unusual for a Vistana to exchange letters with an outsider such as myself, Cyrilla and I have been friends and colleagues for many years—ever since we joined forces against an especially vicious werewolf bent on destroying an entire village in northern Darkon. Cyrilla is a true sage, and I trust her observations implicitly.

Only last year Cyrilla wrote to me of a young Vistani woman, Cyrilla's own niece, whose impassioned dancing was the pride of the entire clan. The young woman, known as Vassa, had many suitors, but neither she nor her family found any of them worthy.

One particular young man seemed unable to accept Vassa's rejection. For days at a time he sat outside her family's wagon, praising the girl's beauty and dancing. She did not respond. After months, the young lad despaired and left the clan, cursing Vassa and her father. The boy left a note, vowing that somehow he would make Vassa his own.

Weeks passed and there was no sign of the lad. The Vistani assumed the boy was gone for good.

The creature dropped from the rafters, some thirty feet above, landing just behind poor Irina. Laughing horribly, the monster grabbed our companion by the neck, lifting her off the ground with a strength unbelievable in such spindly arms. Still laughing, the thing broke Irina's neck before any of us, even the elf Darien, could move. Scampering away into the darkness, it left us with our dead friend and the echoes of its hideous, unstoppable laughter.

I have never felt such unrepentant, alien evil as when we faced that laughing golem. I hope to never face such evil again.

—From the journal of Hataras the Quiet

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If only this had been true. One month after the boy's disappearance, Vassa too disappeared. Exhaustive searching and the application of Cyrilla's formidable skills soon found the girl, but in body only. Although she yet breathed, nothing the Vistani attempted could bring Vassa back to consciousness. Eventually, the girl stopped breathing. Vassa was mourned and her body burned on a pyre, as was the custom of her clan.

The following year the clan was back in the section of Corvus where Vassa was kidnapped. One evening, the clan was celebrating a particularly successful trade when a whirling dervish appeared in their midst. Dressed in colorful skirts, adorned with bangles, the creature danced clumsily about the fire.

Cyrilla's own words best describe what next occurred:

The creature looked like some child's toy made of river clay and mud, and smelled much the same. With ungainly movement, it spun round and round the fire. I remember how the creature's ugliness intensified the gauzy beauty of its twirling skirts. Strange what we think of in times of true horror!

By this time the musicians had ceased to play, and all save myself had backed fearfully away from the monstrosity. But I stayed. Why? I believe I recognized something in the golem even then. The blood of the Vistani is strong, and I know my kin, Van Richten.

Awkward and out-sized, it lumbered up to me, until it stood within arm's length. Its stench was so foul my breath caught in my throat and my eyes began to water.

"Have you no kiss for me? No kiss for Katya?" it whispered tauntingly.

Oh, Van Richten, I had only called one person by that pet name. It was Vassa, she of the nimble feet and flowing hair. This lumbering form contained the spirit of the laughing, shining girl, but that spirit was now twisted into a hideous mockery of her former sweetness.

I managed to speak to her only briefly before she struck out at me, but I doubt my words had

any effect. I almost died that night, doctor. The strength embodied in that body was unbelievable. My magic protected me, but only just. I wish I could say I destroyed the golem that night, but I cannot. It was all I could do that night to drive the thing from our camp. Perhaps my powers were simply not sufficient, but I think my heart was also not in the terrible task. For although the monstrosity was intent upon my death, I sensed that some small shred of Vassa remained trapped within that lumbering body, aware of the horrible parody of life and beauty she had become.

I am convinced the boy who left our camp found some way to place Vassa's spirit in that hideous body. That one Vistana could do this to another is a great shame to our people. Van Richten, if you ever run into poor Vassa, you must destroy her. The human mind cannot even begin to comprehend the bleak horror of her new existence.

I have discovered several other occurrences in which a golem knows information only a particular loved one would know. We can only imagine the horror of finding oneself trapped in a golem's body, as one's humanity is slowly stripped away.

My only child, Erasmus, was placed in a similar situation when Baron Metus transformed him into a vampire. Erasmus came to me and asked me to destroy him, as he could feel his mind and his spirit twisting into some monstrosity. This I did for my brave, wonderful child. I can only believe that becoming a golem is just as horrible, if not more so, than what Erasmus experienced.

I have heard of but one instance where an individual was said to have been placed in a golem body, only to have the process reversed. The story was highly fragmented, and the source is suspect, but that does not mean the possibility should be discounted entirely. Where there is even a remote chance to save an innocent, people of conscience must strive to the utmost to reclaim that lost soul.

However, even if it is possible to reverse the procedure, I am certain there is an extremely limited period of time in which this could be accomplished. The reversal would need to be made before the original body died, although if the body could be resurrected it still might be possible to perform the reversal. An even greater time limitation is the one imposed by the spirit itself. It cannot be very long before all remembrance of the spirit's former life disappears and the individual's life force becomes irretrievably warped, or even dissolved utterly. I would assume that the window of opportunity for such a reversal would be anywhere between several days and a month in length, depending upon a number of variables.

Brain Transplants

When considering flesh golems, there is one more way in which a spirit might be placed within the creature's body. Though I know very little of this method and it is truly horrid to contemplate, I would be remiss if I did not present it: The creator may actually transfer the physical brain of a *living* being into the prepared vessel. It is truly maddening to think that the golem's mind may retain some knowledge of its former self—and know the great atrocity that had been committed.

When the creator of the golem transfers a living brain into the body of the Created, the spirit of the brain's donor is also transferred. Of course, without a brain to direct its function, the body of the donor soon perishes. Such a transplant cannot work if the donor perishes *before* the transplant is complete, however. A dead brain can serve only as an empty vessel for the dark or stolen soul, as described earlier. The operation on the living tissue is extremely delicate and must be performed quickly; else the brain will surely perish and the spirit with it.

If the operation is successful, the spirit of the individual is transferred. A significant jolt of energy is required to bind the spirit to its new form. I shall address this topic below. Note,



however, that the energy required to bind a transplanted spirit may not be as great as that used to bind a dark or stolen soul to the abysmal prison that is the golem body.

Fusing Body and Spirit

Once the body of the construct has been prepared, and the spirit has been selected or attracted toward it, the most difficult and mysterious portion of the creation process is yet to occur. Somehow, through a massive surge of energy, the golem spirit is bound to the vessel. A metaphysically transfiguring fusion of body and spirit occurs, and the golem comes to life. The precise manner by which this process works is only guessed at by researchers more gifted than myself.

My own poor excursions into the realm of theory have convinced me that the required energy can be either physical or what I term *psychic* in origin. A third force—magical

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energy—may also suffice, though it could be coupled with another form. I shall address magical animations briefly below, and focus on the other two energy sources first. Whatever the source, however, there is no question that animation is achieved on at least some occasions.

The exact amount of energy required is unknown, if not immeasurable. However, in the physical case, we can estimate it to be at least the amount of energy transmitted in a bolt of lightning. There have been several documented cases in which lightning has either animated a golem construct or reanimated a golem which was thought to be destroyed.

Other equally powerful sources of energy would presumably serve the same purpose. However, whatever physical energy is applied must come in the form of a *sudden* shock or jolt. A steady but less potent energy flow does not provide the catalytic energy needed to bond the spirit to the body.

The exact process through which the spirit, the life essence as it were, of a living being is removed from its natural body and placed within the golem is unknown. However, it is certain that the two bodies must first be positioned closely together. If physical energy is to be used, the jolt required for animation must then strike *both* physical forms either simultaneously or in quick succession. If the energy jolt does not affect the bodies simultaneously, the living body must be the first to be struck.

I have noted many instances of successful animation, including that involving my dear friend Antonin Madren, where the available evidence fails to reveal any readily apparent source of physical energy. Given the absence of physical or magical energy, I believe that the body and spirit are fused and transformed by the sudden release of *psychic* energy.

The creation of a golem is an act of evil—this is my firm belief. Further, the creators are driven by obsessions which almost inevitably plunge them into madness. These obsessions serve to justify to the creator evil deeds ranging from the

petty to the most heinous imaginable. The creators of these golems are in agony, and all too often they have placed innocent victims in agony as well.

I theorize that the mad obsession, the pain and suffering, and above all the overwhelming evil associated with the creation of a golem coalesce as a crackling, swirling nimbus of psychic energy around the creator and his created. This energy builds until the ultimate moment, when it suddenly reaches a transcendent peak at which it breaches the barriers between our material world and the darker world of spirits.

The surge of psychic energy draws the requisite spirit through the tattered barrier between the tangible and the intangible, into the vortex which is the Created. Whether the spirit is a dark and evil being which exults in its new-found form, or an innocent soul silently screaming against its fate, it has now combined with the physical shell prepared by the creator to form a golem.

I realize that at first blush this theory may seem radical, even somewhat wild, to some. Yet careful study and research will reveal that this theory in all ways comports with observed reality and provides a logical explanation for the otherwise inexplicable.

Every creator carefully chooses the materials used to construct his “child.” Many choose the animating spirit, or personality, just as selectively. Some creators, such as the young Vistani man of Cyrilla’s acquaintance, become obsessed with a specific individual and attempt to place that person’s spirit within the golem.

The massive energy current causes the spirit to separate and transfer from its original body to that of the waiting golem. The transference understandably causes some degradation of the personality, including memory loss, confusion, and a return to a childlike state of being. I have heard tell of some very few people who maintained some memories of the experience and were able, with the help of their comrades to reverse the process.

I must say that the hope of such a reversal is exceedingly slim. Besides requiring the original body to survive another massive energy charge, the window of opportunity for such a reversal is very small for two reasons. In the first place, the original body will die in a matter of weeks without a personality residing within it. To keep the body functional for even that long requires near constant care.

Secondly, and most importantly, even if the new golem maintains much of its former personality, that personality is already degrading. Certainly within the course of a month the old personality will be utterly gone, replaced by a hateful, lonely, sociopathic creature with no hope of redemption.

Magical Energies

It has long been known that wizards, and to a lesser degree priests, can create certain types of golems, including flesh, bone, clay, doll, glass, iron, stone. (The list of types animated through magic is actually longer, of course, but the permutations are not important to the discussion at hand.) The mages and priests who create these golems do so through a rigorous process of research and the casting of multiple spells. There are even rumored to be a few manuals holding the secrets of golem creation somewhere in this misty realm.

I believe the creators of such golems enjoy more control over their progeny than the twisted personalities who animate a golem through their madness and obsession alone. This is not to say that these mages and priests do not risk their creation turning upon them, however. The risk is always present, and it grows over the course of time. Despite the research and methodical planning, despite the great intelligence of the creators, the eventuality is much the same. Even a golem created through magic grows to despise its creator. In time, the creator will lose control of the monster and face possible death at the golem's hands.

I take this to mean that the powerful magical workings involved in creating the golem and bringing it to life eventually involve the same dark forces which give shape to other golems in Ravenloft. The process may at first appear different due to the creator's greater degree of control, but this may simply serve to lull an incautious creator to his doom.

The "traditional" automaton created by a wizard or priest is the only golem a player character (PC) can create while in Ravenloft. In other words, only those PCs who are high-level wizards or priests can succeed. A player character may not even attempt to create the golems through obsession (the method discussed throughout this book).

Such an act hardly qualifies as a noble pursuit. The attempt to create life is suspect in any world. However, those who toy at such grand schemes in Ravenloft place themselves in special peril, for the powers of the demiplane itself are apt to supply the spirit which will inhabit the vessel. Any character who does attempt to create a golem is subject to powers checks: one for every month of research or work. A Ravenloft powers check is also in order whenever the PC commits an evil act associated with the construction—robbing a grave, for example. The base chance for attracting the attention of the dark powers is 10%. (As usual, DMs should feel free to adjust this percentage to suit their campaigns.)

Thus, the PC who embarks on this course of action in following the path to self-destruction (DMs should make this clear to players). In no way should creating a golem be beneficial to a player character. It is an evil act, and usually proves fatal in time. Even if the PC succeeds, his creation will do everything in its power to free itself and turn on its creator (the PC).



The Spark of Life

A stute readers may be wondering why the creators of flesh golems do not simply choose *one* body to house the darkling or stolen spirit that will bring it to life. After all, this is surely the simplest course of action. Instead of spending hours in dark graveyards and hospices, risking discovery many times over, the would-be creator could simply select an appropriate vessel that is whole. The vessel would also be seamless in appearance, physically impossible to discern from normal mortals of its species.

Nonetheless, as I noted in the previous chapter, at least six bodies must be used in the construction of a flesh golem. I believe several reasons determine why no single corpse can suffice. Some involve the mindset of the creator himself. Others, which are even more difficult to prove, point to the actual requirements of the vessel.

The first objection to choosing a single vessel arises from the creator's expectations regarding his creation's appearance or prowess. Simply put, very few mortal bodies have all the strength, stamina, size, and dexterity that the creator might wish for his golem. To the casual observer, this might seem a paltry concern. Yet to those individuals whose driving needs push them into creating a golem at all, simple expedience is far outweighed by the creator's specific requirements, whatever they may be.

Secondly, many creators of golems have a strong need to prove their brilliance or artistry (often to themselves alone). To this end, they experiment crazily. For example, they may place the eyes of an elf and the heart of a lion in the body of a dwarf. This sort of bizarre experimentation may well increase the creator's feelings of omnipotence. To a mind so twisted, every individual who lays eyes on the golem will be forced to acknowledge the creator's power and genius.

Thus, we have reviewed the first two reasons why multiple bodies are required in the construction of a flesh golem: No single body can reflect all the qualities desired, and the ego of the creator demands a hand in shaping his own unique progeny. Both are equally valid, and both most certainly play a role in many cases. However, I believe there is a third and final reason for the need to use these unmatched parts—a reason which overrides both of those previously stated.

As I have learned through the journal of a lich I once pursued, even dead bodies still hold onto some tiny piece of the energies of life. This *spark of life*, as I term it, is what first enabled the lich to create dreadful zombie golems. I believe this spark of life also provides much of the energy required to bind the spirit of the flesh golem to the body.

If my theory is correct, the amount of energy left in the tissue of one body alone is simply insufficient for this task. Furthermore, I suspect that the spark of life within a single body is too closely connected to the spirit of the person who once inhabited the vessel—and thus, the body automatically rejects an invading presence.

Any portion of a corpse still retains that spark of life, although it is diminished. Thus, the spark of life within just one body may be insufficient, but when the life energy remaining in *several* bodies is combined, it may be create a force great enough to allow animation. Furthermore, a body cobbled from multiple forms may not contain enough of any *single* personality's essence to prevent a new spirit from entering it.

As I have stated, these are but theories; I have no proof to support my claims. However, one thing is assured: I have never seen, nor heard of, a flesh golem that was fashioned from fewer than six separate bodies (though some were assembled from more than twenty!). Thus, we can be reasonably assured that no single corpse may ever count itself among the Created.

March the Eleventh

To whomever may find this note:

I do not know how long I shall have before they come looking for me. But when I leave this world, I wish to hold the knowledge that I performed at least this one courageous act, however small, before my death. Would I had the strength to have opened my eyes sooner!

Now I must somehow set to paper the words which I can hardly bear to think. The child which my barren body could never bear has been brought into this world; even now it crawls through the halls of this fell place, somehow alive. But where a true child is a blessing, the thing below is a blighted curse! No child of mine.

Though he readily accepted my family's fortune, my husband could never accept my barrenness. His need for children was strong. But I never knew how strong, never thought of his need when the babies began to disappear from the neighboring morgues . . . until this morning when I discovered his journal.

He—a doctor, sworn to nurture and fight for the life of every patient—he took those poor infants and stole their chance for eternal peace. This very evening I followed him to his laboratory, and there saw a strange infant lying upon a table, wrapped in layers of dark blue wool. The smell of antiseptic was everywhere, the air so close I must have swooned. The next thing I remember was a horrid crashing sound and the scent of burning wool. Light dazzled my eyes, and it was a few moments before I could again see properly.

When my vision cleared, I saw him holding the infant aloft, exactly as I had seen him hold the babies of our acquaintances. But this thing—this thing was a deformed parody of those joyous infants, its arms and legs disjointed, its face deformed. And the silence! Such grave silence from a newborn. Then I saw the hideous eyes, the flesh, this child sewn together as a quilt is pieced, from the scavenged remains of—

Ah! He has found me. . . .

I write these final words even as he struggles to break down the door. He whom I took to be my husband but five years ago—he has determined to murder me to hide his secret. You who read this know that I am gone, but my husband and his creation may yet live! I only pray the journal falls into the hands of good people who will use the knowledge to stop my husband and his child, and others like them if there is more such evil in this world!

—Evania Fairwind

Chapter III: CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts he shall end in certainties.

—Francis Bacon,
The Advancement of Learning

There are precious few certainties in this life; but too often we cling to them as two drowning men clutch at each other, each afraid to let go and swim for shore. Thus do they both lose what they most desired, and thus can we lose sight of the larger truths around us.

—Dr. Rudolph Van Richten,
excerpt from
a letter to Cassien Attenberg

This chapter concerns itself with the fundamental physical and mental abilities of the flesh golem—the most prevalent variety, and the one with which I am most familiar. Following this, I shall address the flesh golem's more outwardly impressive traits. As we shall soon discuss, however, even a golem's most fundamental abilities are terrifying in their enormity.

When considering the traits of the flesh golem, we are faced with an immense task and little firm knowledge. Unfortunately, little, if any, properly conducted research has been done. As a result, we are faced with a difficult situation. What do we believe and what do we discount? Too often we leap to embrace any information that only *appears* valid. Yet if we ignore facts not in evidence because they seem unlikely, then we may overlook some critical truth.

As I compiled research for this tome, I strictly ordered myself to proceed cautiously and with an open mind. I also vowed to be candid so that I might not mislead any reader into mistaking supposition for fact.

Thus, as I delineate the various characteristics of the flesh golem, I bid you to keep this caveat firmly in mind: *Golems are individuals.* While the

term “mundane” may apply to a few unintelligent creations brought to life through conventional magic, in my experience such foes are the exception to the rule. True, each golem may share basic traits with others of its kind. But it also may display unique mental or physical characteristics. Such unique qualities are especially apparent in flesh golems who were brought to life through the sheer will of their creators. Thus, one should view each golem as we do any villain who strikes from the shadows: a unique nemesis about whom we know little. In facing this lack of knowledge, we can, however, cling to one certainty: All golems are tremendously powerful.

This chapter focuses on unusual golems made of flesh. Although there is no such thing as an “average” flesh golem, the statistics below reflect a golem's base ability scores. All statistical modifiers in this chapter build upon these base scores.

TABLE 3: Base Statistics (Flesh Golems)

Strength	19	Intelligence	9–19 (2d6 + 7)
Dexterity	18	Wisdom	2
Constitution	20	Charisma	6
Movement	12	THACO	11
Armor Class	6	No. of Attacks	2
Hit Dice	9	Damage	2d8/2d8



CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Basic Physical Traits

In this section, I shall outline the physical traits of the flesh golem—specifically, its strength, dexterity, and constitutional fortitude—and describe how these traits may vary between individuals.

Do not allow any alarm you might feel at the brute physical power of the Created to overwhelm you. It is a temptation even I have succumbed to on occasion, falling into my old habits of over-intellectualizing to distance myself from the contemplation of such power. Ah! You see? I am still using my old defense even now. Do not be ashamed if you wish to do the same. After all, there is no shame in fear itself—it is an instinct that helps keep us alive. But when we are frightened, we must not deny it, lest our unadmitted fear cloud our thinking and keep us from properly assessing a golem's abilities. Such misguided thinking has brought about the death of too many good people.

Before we begin our analysis, I would remind the reader of the following: While all the information given reflects the typical case study, not all golems will conform precisely to this analysis. Some may be even more powerful, others less fearsome.

Strength

The profound strength of the Created can cause even the bravest of warriors to hesitate. I do not believe I exaggerate in saying that most golems are as powerful as some giants! This is all the more impressive considering the average flesh golem stands only seven to eight feet tall, and some individuals are much smaller. (Even doll golems are said to be able to lift a full-sized human male and toss him about as if *he* were the doll. I would not be surprised to learn of a diminutive flesh golem who did the same!)

The basis for this immense strength does not seem to rely directly on the components

used to construct the golem, although stronger limbs can certainly add to the golem's already formidable strength. Instead, it appears that the flesh (or other material) is tempered and strengthened during the tremendous energy surge that accompanies the creation process. Each cell burns with a new life, which apparently lends an unnatural capacity to the body as a whole. This tensile strength may in part aid the body in trapping or retaining an appropriate animating spirit or essence.

Big or small, all golems are strong. However, the size of a golem does affect its physical prowess. The average flesh golem is of *large* size. But what of the golem built with a hill giant's torso? Or with a dwarf's bandy legs? Such modifications may result in unusual sizes, which affect Strength scores as shown on the table below.

TABLE 4: Size and Strength

Size Category	Strength Modifier
Huge (12 ft. or more)	+2
Large (7–12 ft.)	+1
Medium (4–7 ft.)	0
Small (2–4 ft.)	–1
Tiny (under 2 ft.)	–2

Golems with a Strength greater than 19 can inflict more damage, as noted on the following table:

TABLE 5: Strength and Damage

Strength	Damage
20	2d8 + 1
21	2d8 + 2
22	2d8 + 3
23	3d8
24	3d8 + 1
25	3d8 + 2

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Dexterity

Despite their often lumbering appearance, flesh golems are surprisingly nimble and flexible. This account by my longtime scout, Markil, provides an apt description and warning:

"I'm takin' my shift at guard, sittin' in the tree near the fire like I do, when I see this big thing shufflin' towards me. I can't quite make it out, but I figure such a mashed-up lump of a creature can't be too much of a danger at the moment, being it's still fifty feet away. So's I turn my head to hiss down at Dr. Van Richlen and get his attention. Next thing I know, there's this pushing feelin', and I'm wakin' up with one mean headache. Guess it's just a good thing that golem hit me 'stead of tearin' me in two. You just never figure a thing like that can move so fast."

Markil is correct: The deceptively clumsy appearance of most golems must never lull the hunter into believing his prey to be slow. I do not believe I have ever faced a golem who was not as fast or faster than the most dexterous of my companions, although I have read accounts of slow and fumbling golems.

The power of the creature was poetic, in the same manner as a hurricane or volcanic eruption achieves epic proportions. It seems I stood breathless for hours, gazing at the crags and fissures of the being's variegated features. It was as if the gods had decided this land of ours would not do, and thus sent this creature to tear it down so they could start anew.

Those were my first impressions of the golem I had traveled day and night to confront. It was a monstrous thing, yes, but it had achieved a level of monstrosity so primal that it became as awe-inspiring as any force of nature.

—Astonby of the Oaks,
as recorded by Taynesbert in *The Open Palm*

Once again, this remarkable dexterity does not seem dependent upon any particular parts or materials, although they may have some effect. If so, I do not yet have enough information to determine the relationship between specific body parts and quickness.

As noted in Chapter 1 of the *Player's Handbook*, Dexterity scores can affect a character's Armor Class (see the section titled "Defensive Adjustment"). The same modifiers can be applied to flesh golems whose Dexterity varies from the base score of 18. For example, a golem with a Dexterity of 21 has an Armor Class of 5 when defending against an attack that can be dodged.

Constitution

Even more than it is strong or dexterous, the flesh golem is resilient. In fact, the fortitude of a golem is almost certainly the greatest of its physical traits, and I am yet in awe of it. These creatures rarely tire in battle, and they can resist many physical and magical attacks. Further, when they are harmed, their capacity to regenerate tissue is nothing less than phenomenal. The Created may well enjoy the greatest physical resiliency of any known creature. This much is true: Of all the foul and fantastical monsters I have fought, there is none—not even my especial foe the vampire—that can match the golem in its sheer resiliency and physical fortitude.

The base Constitution score of flesh golems is 20. Such creatures can regenerate 1 hit point every 6 turns (i.e., every hour). A golem with a greater Constitution score regenerates at a faster rate, as listed in Table 3 of the *Player's Handbook* (see "Regeneration").

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Creating Golems

As the DM, you may wish to create your own unique golem. This is highly encouraged; “personalized” golems are more interesting and far more frightening, since the players won’t know the precise abilities of their foe without proper investigation.

The information in this chapter and the next provides a means for creating a new, unique golems. It is assumed that each monster will be “fleshed out” as fully as any NPC, with enough depth to serve as the focus of an adventure. Although this book is mainly concerned with golems of flesh, Chapter IV offers suggestions for other types. In any case, a DM must make the following decisions when creating a new golem:

Who created the golem? It is very important to determine what kind of person created (or is creating) the golem. Each creator is driven by unique obsessions and needs. Deciding on a creator’s background often determines many of the golem’s eventual abilities and skills.

For example, if the creator is a physician, he might be obsessed with creating the perfect physical specimen. Such a golem probably would be made of flesh, and might be more physically powerful than others of its kind. Or perhaps the creator is a writer obsessed with making a bizarre creature from his novel come to life. Such a golem might be a strange collection of animal and humanoid body parts.

What type of golem is it? Although most golems are made of flesh, it is possible to create golems from wood, stone, glass, and many other materials (see Chapter IV).

If flesh, what body parts to select? Traditionally, a minimum of six bodies must be used in the creation of a flesh golem: one distinct source for each limb, another for the torso and head, and one for the brain itself. It is certainly possible to use components from more than six bodies, however. Further, parts from exceptional humans or other creatures can give a golem unusual powers and abilities (see page 45 for further details).

What are its extraordinary abilities? This chapter suggests unusual powers or skills that can set your golem apart from others of its kind (see page 39 for details). Such powers help keep the players off guard, and make the creature a more challenging opponent. Take care not to make your golem *too* challenging, however. In general, an individual creature should receive no more than one or two of these extraordinary abilities.

What are its peculiar vulnerabilities? MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® entries for golems describe the common vulnerabilities of each variety. However, just as you may grant an individual golem an extraordinary ability, you should consider hindering it with an unusual weakness. The “zeitgeber” described in this chapter is just one example (see page 35). Vulnerability to a particular form of weapon is another.

Most golems can be struck only by enchanted weapons. However, each golem type might also be vulnerable to a particular blessed weapon. Such weapons cause full damage to the susceptible creature. Note that the list below is optional; Dungeon Masters should feel free to devise a vulnerability tailored to a particular golem’s history and physical type.

TABLE 6: Optional Weapon Vulnerabilities

Golem	Weapon Vulnerability
Bone	Blessed mace
Clay	Blessed pick
Flesh	Blessed pitchforks or spear
Glass	Blessed hammer
Metal	Blessed sword
Stone	Blessed pick
Straw	Blessed sickle
Wood	Blessed axe

Final Touches? The quality of craftsmanship and the physical state of body parts used can also have an affect on the golem’s abilities—and it need not be for the better! For example, flesh golems do not age as a rule, but an improperly constructed body might well decay, presenting an ever more frightening visage to the PCs.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Mental Abilities

The mental capabilities of most golems can be impressive, though they certainly are not as formidable as the creature's physical traits. I shall address two aspects of the flesh golem's mind here: its innate intelligence and its telepathic talents. The psychology of the golem—how it views itself and others—is a topic reserved for another chapter.

Intelligence

Travelers from distant lands often claim that a flesh golem has no more cunning than an animal. This is a grave mistake! Perhaps such people are fooled by the golem's often bestial, uncivilized appearance. Indeed, that appearance has led many an incautious hunter to underestimate his foe and pay for the mistake with his life.

Flesh golems do appear to lack certain advanced mental capabilities, however. There is no evidence that any member of the Created (flesh or otherwise) can appreciate art or grasp complicated philosophical or mathematical principles. On the other hand, I know of no reliable scientist who has spent any length of time conversing with a golem, much less making a serious study of its psyche or intellect. While the creator of a golem often attempts and even relishes such a study, he is incapable of impartial observation. Therefore, it is currently impossible to determine the precise mental limitations of the golem.

Where golems do excel mentally is in low cunning and the ability to manipulate and maneuver in order to gain what they desire. In fact, golems may well be as intelligent, in their fashion, as most humans. Further, it may well be that golems simply do not care about certain issues, and thus only devote their faculties to achieving their personal goals, whatever those might be.

I must offer one additional caution on the mental faculties of golems. Virtually all of the

Created have indomitable wills. These monsters are capable of single-mindedly following a course of action for as long as it takes to succeed. Most assuredly, this is why so few creators survive once a golem decides it wishes its "parent" dead—the golem is relentless. My own departed friend and student Antonin Madren was pursued by his creation across several lands before that beast succeeded in striking him down.

If you ever discover a golem bent on a course of action involving the harm of others, you must immediately turn all your efforts to stopping the creature. Else you must find someone who is willing to do so themselves. Otherwise, who knows how many individuals could lose their lives to the will and power of such a creature?

A flesh golem's Intelligence score is determined by the type of brain used. As a general rule, the score is at least one rank below that of the brain's original "owner" (see Intelligence ratings in the *Monstrous Manual*). For example, a golem with the brain of a wereraven (genius) would be rated "exceptionally intelligent" (15–16), while a golem with the brain of a normal human would have a low Intelligence (5–7). This assumes, however, that the brain is relatively fresh and in excellent condition.

Note that even in Ravenloft, creatures built from a substance other than flesh are most often nonintelligent, following the standard presented in the *Monstrous Manual*; they have no brain upon which intelligence can be measured. This is particularly true of golems created through conventional magics. However, any golem born of obsession and given life by the mysterious powers of Ravenloft could exhibit both great intelligence and a distinct personality; such exceptional creatures are described in Chapter IV.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Telepathic Talent

My brief conversation with Antonin Madren, the former student whose plight first introduced me to golems, indicated the golem he created was able to speak into his mind. Further, Antonin indicated that the golem seemed to always know where he was, and perhaps even what Antonin was thinking. Granted, Antonin was by no means in his right mind when he imparted this information to me. His feelings of persecution, hearing of voices, confused desperation—all are symptoms of paranoia, a psychological disorder.

Several times in the course of my research on the Created I have run across physicians' documents mentioning paranoia, delusional psychosis, and like diagnoses about an individual who (it was later discovered) had created a golem. Of course, the vast majority of individuals so diagnosed truly have the disorder in question, and are not the creators of golems. Nonetheless, I do feel it is always worthwhile to ask the village's physician, wise woman, priest, or other healer whether they have recently counseled anyone with such delusional or psychotic symptoms. At least once, an investigation of mine was solved by asking just such questions. On other occasions, when the creator had already been murdered by his "child," I was at least given information helpful in tracking the golem in question.

The creation of a golem involves a sustained period of passionate, all-consuming commitment from the creator. Apparently, one element necessary to the success of the project is the need for a bond to develop between creator and child. However, all evidence indicates that this bond is one-way only. The golem child has great access to the mind of its creator.

The bond seems to be a perversion of the special relationship an infant shares with its mother. As an infant draws sustenance from the mother, the golem apparently needs access to its creator's mind. However, the sustenance gathered from the poisoned mind of the creator inevitably drives the golem to hate its parent.

The Created seem to use their knowledge of their creators to torment and track their "parents." Most golems do not appear to read every waking thought of their creator precisely. Rather, they seem to gain fragmented images and emotions from their creator, enough to give the golems an uncanny ability to discern the creator's whereabouts and predict a creator's actions. This is undoubtedly the reason why so few creators of golems manage to escape the ministrations of their foul progeny.

When I state that the golems must have need of this perverse bond, I may be overstepping myself. Perhaps the only true reason the golem is given the "gift" of a telepathic bond to its creator is to punish the one who would bring such a horror to life.

A flesh golem maintains a unique telepathic bond with its creator. At will, the creature can see through the creator's eyes. This ability, coupled with an uncanny ability to know in which direction the creator lies, enables golems to track their makers with a skill no bloodhound could equal. The golem's telepathy is so invasive that the monster, in effect, knows its creator better than the creator knows himself. The creator can keep no desires, fears, dreams, or feelings from his golem. (In this sense, the ability resembles the psionic power of empathy, with no limit to range.) The golem's telepathic ability also enables it to "speak" into the creator's mind at will, regardless of range.

The telepathic power binding the golem and its creator lies solely with the golem. In other words, the creator cannot sense the thoughts or emotions of the golem. Nor can the creator intentionally send messages to the golem. This bond can only be broken if the creator is shielded by powerful magic. Even when the creator is so shielded, the telepathic "voice" of the golem can still reach him, though the golem may lose other benefits of the bond.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Odd Parts and Basic Traits

One of the easiest ways to create a unique flesh golem is through the use of unusual or exceptional body parts. Body parts taken from monsters, demihuman races, and even animals can affect the golem's basic ability scores and other fundamental statistics. (Unusual parts may also give a golem other extraordinary abilities, which are discussed on page 45.)

Table 7 is organized by body part. Each subtable presents a range of creatures whose corpses might supply components to the adventurous assembler. However, the charts are by no means exhaustive. Further, they're provided as guidelines only; as DM, you should feel free to expand and adapt the information as you see fit. For example, if a maniacal NPC in your campaign creates a flesh golem using the arms of a hobgoblin, you could assume this option boosts the creature's Strength by 1 point, considering a hobgoblin is similar in Strength to a bugbear.

There is one restriction in regard to combining various creatures' body parts: *All parts used to create a particular golem must come from creatures within one size category of each other.* For example, the arms of a hill giant (size huge) could not be placed on the body of a human (size medium). However, the same arms could be placed on the body of a gnoll (size large). The *Monstrous Manual* lists all size categories for monsters and creatures.

TABLE 7: Effect of Odd Body Parts

Torsos	
Hill giant	+3 Strength
Ogre	+2 Strength
Bugbear	+1 Strength
Dwarf	+1 Constitution
Horse	+1 Constitution, +1 Strength
Arms	
Hill giant	+2 Strength, -2 Dexterity
Owlbear	+1 Strength, +2 Damage (from claws)
Goblin	+1 Strength, +1 Dexterity
Elf	+1 Dexterity
Gnoll	+1 Strength
Legs	
Horse	MV 24; extra attacks 2 rear hooves, damage 1d4/1d4
Elf	+1 Dexterity
Ogre	MV 9, +1 Strength
Huge spider	MV 18, +1 Dexterity
Wolfwere	MV 18, +1 Constitution
Miscellaneous	
Elf eyes	60' infravision, +1 Charisma
Giant fly eyes	360-degree vision; surprised on roll of 1 only
Heart of a lion	+1 Hit Dice
Heart of a paladin	+2 Hit Dice, +2 Charisma
Blood of a bard	+1 Charisma

Biological Concerns

Issues normally addressed when discussing the biology of a species include essential bodily functions, nutritional requirements, and the like. Certain basic questions arise. For example, is the species mammalian, insectile, and so forth? Are they air or water breathers? I shall address such topics below.

Also of concern in a biological survey are reproductive characteristics, including mating rit-

uals, gestational times, and the like. Golems do not reproduce (a limitation for which we may be thankful), so these issues do not greatly concern us here. If a flesh golem were to seek a mate, it would be for purely psychological reasons, rather than a response to any physical drive.

In general, it can be assumed that flesh golems are closer to mammals in nature than any other type of creature. However, this is at best a loose association—a remembrance of the body's past, perhaps.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FLESH

Life Span

By all accounts, golems do not experience physical development, nor do they age. It is possible that a golem's life span is so long that we, who live for but a moment by comparison, simply cannot recognize such gradual changes. However, for all practical purposes, we must assume that flesh golems can live forever. (Not surprisingly, this immortality applies equally to golems made of materials others than flesh.)

I base this assumption upon the experiences of others, as well as upon my own firsthand observations. There are legends of individual golems appearing and reappearing in a specific area over the course of centuries. (Most notable are those accounts of a powerful fiend who haunts the isles off the coast of Lamordia.) Of course, it is quite possible that more than one flesh golem might be at work in such tales. However, given the rarity of these creatures, and given further similarities noted by the witnesses, it seems likely to me that similar accounts spanning centuries do indeed describe the same creature. This certainly supports the notion of a very long life span.

It seems that flesh golems do undergo an initial period of mental development, and are thereafter mature. Fortunately, there is no indication that golems gain power or prowess with age. On the other hand, neither do they seem to lose any power.

Golems do not age as a rule. Thus, they live until they're destroyed. Rare exceptions might include a flesh golem that was improperly constructed, or a creature condemned to aging by the mysterious powers of Ravenloft.

Respiration

It is still questionable whether golems have any true need to breathe. Many observers have claimed that the creatures do; after all, most



golems can generally speak and make other vocalizations, so it would appear their lungs are functional. My own belief is as follows: While many golems are *able* to breathe, few (if any) require air to sustain themselves. In short, they could suspend their breathing indefinitely without any ill effect.

I have heard of a peculiar flesh golem who has supposedly taken to haunting the seas west of Martira Bay, where his creator was a fisherman. Apparently, this golem can remain underwater for extended periods of time without sustaining any harm whatsoever. Of course, this ability may be a peculiarity of the particular golem, but I do not believe this to be the case.

Despite this phenomenon, if you should have an opportunity to bury a golem under an avalanche, for example, or to drown the monster, by all means attempt it. At the worst, such a tactic might afford you and your fellows some time to regroup—a rare luxury when battling the Created! Perhaps the attempt will even be successful in disabling your enemy. Still, you must be ever vigilant. Never make the assumption your foe is truly defeated until all that remains of the fiend is ashes and nightmares.

All golems—flesh and otherwise—can survive without breathing. Thus, they cannot be harmed by being choked, buried, immersed in water, or by any other suffocating attack. Additionally, golems are not subject to spells that affect the respiratory system (such as *stinking cloud*, *cloudkill*, and so forth).

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Nutritional Requirements

It is uncertain whether golems have any nutritional requirements whatsoever. If the creature needs no air to sustain its unnatural life, then is it not reasonable to assume it also can forego food? However, some few observers have noted that golems have the capacity to eat if they so desire. Of course, that still begs the question as to whether such golems eat out of necessity or for sheer pleasure. After all, many of us eat simply because we enjoy the act itself. Perhaps golems feel the same.

To my knowledge, only one golem has been held in captivity for any length of time. The danger of such a proposal is so prohibitive as to be almost unthinkable, yet I know of one group who attempted it nonetheless. May the gods look kindly upon their souls!

Apparently, the group included three brave individuals: the foreign mage Maya Junifell, the dwarf priest Taganaceous Barrelfist, and the

sage warrior Astonby of the Oaks (the same warrior-philosopher whose engrossing adventures are chronicled in Taynesbert's epic saga *The Open Palm*). These brave friends and comrades managed to successfully battle the flesh golem into unconsciousness and place the creature within a specially prepared chamber.

Of the few scraps of notes later salvaged from the wreckage of their stronghold, one was an observation by Taganaceous regarding the golem's apparent hunger upon awakening. The monster almost immediately devoured two entire suckling pigs left within its enclosure. Taganaceous goes on to report that the golem refused all foodstuffs after that point.

Why did the golem eat the pigs? There are many possible reasons, ranging from fury and a desire to destroy to actual hunger and physical need. However, if golems do need to eat, it is apparently far less often than the vast majority of creatures. Unfortunately, no more than speculation is currently possible given our lack of solid information.

Flesh golems born of obsession need to eat flesh—i.e., fresh meat or carrion—in order to replenish their physical body. However, only one meal a week is required. The flesh consumed is generally equal to that found in a suckling pig. If a golem goes more than one week without consuming flesh, it will begin to lose 1 point of Constitution per week. Once the golem eats sufficiently again, it will regain any Constitution lost at the rate of 1 point per day. (A smart party might even be able to starve a golem under certain circumstances.)

Golems may also hasten their regenerative capabilities by consuming flesh, gaining an additional 2 hit points per turn spent eating. However, eating will *not* give the golem more than its initial number of hit points.

For further information on the regenerative abilities of golems, see pages 38 and 43.

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Zeitgebers

The parts making up a flesh golem's physical form may be seen as being fused into a single, living being. This fusing creates much of the golem's great strength and, in all probability, contributes to their apparent immortality.

The golem's life appears marked by a monotony within as well as without. As I have stated, the creature's appearance and physical prowess do not change with time. Further, while some flesh golems are capable of eating and breathing, they do not need to do so—these processes seem but vestiges of the body's former existence.

Golems also lack any fixed cycle of activity and rest. In short, they do not require sleep. This information may not seem particularly relevant to our concerns, but in fact it is of great interest. Because the Created need no rest, they are able to pursue their activities relentlessly, without any hint of fatigue. This ability places golem hunters at a great disadvantage, as they most certainly need time for both rest and recuperation.

I can offer but one hopeful piece of information on this subject: Golems sometimes respond to *zeitgebers* (TSIGHT gay-bers). A *zeitgeber* is any natural phenomenon that triggers certain behavior in living creatures. For instance, many small mammals respond to the decreasing temperatures of winter by going into hibernation. Hibernation is thus triggered by a *zeitgeber*. In this instance, the onset of a season—with the accompanying drop in temperature and shortening days—is the *zeitgeber*.

The most common *zeitgeber* to which flesh golems respond is light. This response appears to reflect some fragile link to the past existence of the body parts—an unusual sort of “memory,” as it were. In most cases, the *zeitgeber* causes the creature to enter a state of inactivity or comparative weakness. On several occasions, I have noted flesh golems suddenly ceasing their activities for a period of perhaps twenty or thirty seconds at sundown. It is an

The *zeitgeber* can become a key element in an adventure involving a golem. Golems are extremely dangerous foes, and providing an Achilles' heel in the form of a *zeitgeber*, or triggered behavior, can give clever players an interesting weakness to exploit.

A *zeitgeber* can also set a golem of your own creation apart from the ordinary. The list of potential “triggers” is endless. The sound of a certain musical instrument, the sight of an open grave, the scent of lilacs—these are but a few possibilities. However, a particular *zeitgeber* should not be chosen randomly. Rather, the *zeitgeber* should reflect some peculiarity of the monster's creator, or the monster itself. This sort of *zeitgeber* is particularly atmospheric and emphasizes the twisted relationship between creator and creation that is at the heart of many golem adventures.

For example, imagine that the golem's creator is a musician obsessed with the notion of composing and producing the perfect opera. He creates a golem so that he might have the perfect tenor for the starring role. However, whenever the monster hears the strains of organ music, it begins howling uncontrollably in a parody of song. As for possible game effects, while “singing” the golem could suffer a -2 penalty to hit, or even be unable to initiate an attack (although it should remain able to defend itself).

The effects of a *zeitgeber* can be as unique as the *zeitgeber* itself. For example, the creature might attempt to kill anyone who brings the particular trigger into effect, or perhaps the golem would remember its former life for 1d4 rounds. Other possibilities for *zeitgeber* effects include the following: causing the golem pain, making the golem flee for 1d6 rounds, causing the golem to come running, making the golem unable to attack the person causing the *zeitgeber*, and causing the golem to take a particular action, such as dancing.

The DM creating a new golem is encouraged to devise unique *zeitgebers* for the creature, as well as the *zeitgeber*'s unusual effects. A golem with unknown abilities and weaknesses will be much more exciting and horrifying than a monster whose abilities are utterly familiar to players.

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February the Third—*This second day on the mountain was perhaps the coldest I have ever experienced! Even wrapped in five layers of silks, wool, and furs, my body became numb and I succumbed to a bit of frostbite. And the sun on the snow and ice; blinding! I feared I would stumble off the cliff face and tumble to my death before facing the thing that has terrorized the village of Uselix for twenty years.*

The creature is rumored to be eight feet or more in height, rudely put together as if it were the cast-off plaything of some god-child. Its hands are said to be twisted and taloned, with the jaws and wicked teeth of the snow bear.

Perhaps tomorrow I and my local hirelings will be able to bring down this terrible beast-man, and I shall become famous!

—From the journal of Terrence Crannock

odd occurrence, and it certainly does not apply to all creatures. However, those that do exhibit this behavior are probably affected by this zeitgeber.

Of course, it is possible that certain golems may respond to other, more unusual zeitgebers. For example, I have heard one tale of a golem who was halted in its tracks by a particular melody, though I cannot be sure whether the effect was physical, psychological, or both. Such triggers, if discovered, can become useful weapons in the hands of a resourceful golem hunter. Although I would not count on your opponent pausing in such a manner, it is an interesting and possibly exploitable oddity of golem behavior.

Resiliency of Golem Flesh

The flesh forming the body of a golem is apparently greatly transformed during the creation process, becoming stronger, denser, and far less porous. It seems probable this is in fact *necessary* in order for the flesh to

maintain its integrity. This process may be likened in some ways to the transformation certain trees go through in the forests of Keening. Some oaks in that desolate area petrify, their trunks developing a peculiar density similar to that of granite.

The transformed and strengthened flesh appears generally waxen in texture, save around the stitches. Such areas, traumatically sewn and fused together into a workable unit, appear reddish and angry. This effect may fade with the passage of time, however. Thus, a careful observer can guess at the relative “age” of a golem by observing the amount of inflammation around the site of any stitching.

Despite the great strength and density of the golem’s flesh, there is apparently no loss of flexibility. In fact, Kenyard Brisbane, a former student of mine and devoted foe of evil in all its myriad forms, once told me he observed a golem who dislocated his own shoulder entirely—merely to reach a small rabbit hiding within a small hollow! According to Kenyard, the golem appeared to have no qualms whatsoever about such self-mutilation, merely pushing the disjointed arm back into place after he had reached his quarry.

Of course, Kenyard’s observations reveal as much about the golem’s sense of pain as his flexibility. Given this and similar reports, I have come to believe that golems either do not feel pain or that pain does not affect them in the way it does you or me. The vast majority of humans and demihumans find it extremely difficult to function with a dislocated limb. This pain resistance (or lack of the capability to feel pain) is, of course, no boon to golem hunters. Though we may harm a golem, we can never be certain that such damage has impaired its capabilities until the moment the hideous creature actually falls.

I’d like to end this section with an intriguing digression. Kenyard, my former student, noted another curious matter regarding the golem with the dislocated shoulder. Despite an apparent need for an occasional meal, the golem did not

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eat the rabbit once it attained it. Instead, the creature carefully ripped the poor creature apart and then stared at its remains for nearly an hour—as if the golem were performing a biological survey of its own.

Resistance to Toxins

The innards of the flesh golem appear just as rugged as the exterior tissue—as any hunter who has utilized poisonous gas (or poisons of any sort) against their kind can attest. Like all members of the Created, flesh golems are immune to toxins. This immunity serves as a further example that the flesh of the Created no longer functions in anything near its original fashion. Of course, this comes as no real surprise, since the flesh is “deceased” before being violently fused together during the reanimation process.

All golems are utterly immune to poison and cannot be harmed by any toxin. Further, they are completely immune to disease, including magical maladies.

Weapon Immunities

The incredible density of the golem’s flesh creates yet another difficulty for its foes. In most cases, weaponry must be magical to puncture or lacerate this tissue. An unenchanted blade or cudgel pushes into the yet-resilient flesh, but refuses to penetrate and draw blood. For instance, I once observed a fighter thrusting his sword directly into a golem’s neck, but when the sword withdrew, the creature’s skin was unmarred!

Moreover, to “draw blood” from a golem is at best a euphemistic notion. Flesh golems do not truly bleed. When the tissue such a creature is pierced, it oozes a watery, odoriferous liquid similar in appearance to plasma, though the smell is closer to that of rancid meat or a gangrenous wound.

A flesh golem created in Ravenloft can be struck by weapons of +1 or better enchantment (see page 96 for complete combat statistics). They are vulnerable to magical spells, except mind- or life-affecting spells such as *sleep*, *hold*, *charm*, or *finger of death*. Further, they can be struck by creatures with at least 4 + 1 Hit Dice (PCs do not qualify).

Like all golems created in Ravenloft, flesh golems receive a +4 bonus to saving throws against physical damage, including spell effects. They are partially immune to cold and electricity. Cold or electrical attacks cause half damage, but do no harm if the golem makes a successful saving throw.

Fire and acid both cause full damage to flesh golems. Acid can only be held in glass or ceramic containers. A normal-sized flask of acid inflicts 1d8 + 2 points of damage.

A normal metal weapon that has been heated until it is “red hot” and glowing can also be effective against flesh golems. The weapon must be placed in a fire of considerable size and intensity—such as a large bonfire, raging furnace, or some other inferno. The heated weapon must be at least as large as a short sword; otherwise it softens and becomes ineffective. Further, the weapon must make a saving throw vs. magical fire each time it is heated, and a saving throw vs. crushing blow every time the hot metal delivers a blow. If the weapon fails a saving throw, it becomes too warped and/or blunted to be useful. Note that a weapon heated in this manner remains hot for 2 rounds only.

Flesh golems may be susceptible to *blessed* spears or pitchforks (see page 29). As the DM, you should feel free to give an individual golem a unique weapon vulnerability. Try to tailor the vulnerability to the golem’s story, however.

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It is interesting to note that unenchanted weapons do not *always* fail to harm the Created. Apparently, enraged mobs of peasants armed with mere pitchforks and firebrands have brought down a golem on several occasions. Nonetheless, if you ever plan on facing one of these monstrosities, I strongly recommend procuring as many magical weapons as possible. It may well mean the difference between suffering only a few losses and losing your entire party.

Basic Regeneration

*Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches; and
obedience,*

*Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of men, and, of the human
frame,*

A mechanical automaton.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab*, III

One of the most horrific and yet fascinating aspects of the flesh golem's tissue is its capacity to repair itself at an extremely rapid pace. In a matter of hours, a golem can heal completely from a wound that would impair a stalwart warrior for days.

Even more incredible is the sensitivity and adaptability of the flesh golem's system. In recent years, I have begun to believe that the Created have some unique form of regenerative capabilities, which are highly specialized. These powers of regeneration come into use when the golem is mortally injured. I can think of no other reasonable explanation for the uncanny ability of the Created to *fully recover* from horrendous wounds which had felled the creature only minutes before.

I have witnessed this phenomenon several times firsthand, but the first is yet the most vivid. I cannot begin to describe the depths of horror I felt on that fateful night. My battle-worn companions and I were celebrating the demise of our foe—when the very creature rose up in

apparently perfect health! Alas, two more of our number perished before the golem fell again to our weapons and spells. Only my compatriot Nikita and I remained. This time neither she nor I rested until we had burned every piece of the golem's body to ash.

To this day Nikita refuses to hunt another golem, and in truth I cannot blame her. The wiry thief still claims the golem attempted to grab her hand and drag her with it onto its funeral pyre. Although I did not witness the event, being on the other side of the rather large fire, I do not doubt that the golem's great evil and tremendous will enabled such a final attempt.

Be forewarned, good friends! The creature you believe must surely be dead may instead simply be waiting for you to let down your guard before it resumes its attack, fully refreshed and functioning perfectly!

February the Fourth—Tonight I write from the confines of a tiny shelter, which my five remaining hirelings were able to carve out of the ice and snow. Outside, the storm that swept down on our poor group this afternoon rages still.

I grieve for the brave men of Uselix who lost their lives today. And all for nothing! Even as the first gusts of wind and snow reached our group, the creature was upon us. I now know why the thing was so difficult to track. The monster was lying in wait for us, but not behind some rocks or trees. No, it was waiting beneath a layer of snow and ice precisely at the narrowest point in the mountain pass.

Our first man went down before we realized the creature's trap. From that point onward my memory is but a blur, a patchwork made up of dying men and that looming, rending, killing monstrosity. Worse yet, our weapons did not even seem to scratch the thing's hide. . . .

—From the journal of Terrence Crannock

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As noted earlier in this chapter, the regeneration rate of golems is based on their Constitution (see page 28). Thus, regeneration rates vary between 1 hit point per 6 turns (20 Constitution) and 1 hit point per turn (25 Constitution). However, some flesh golems also have the ability known as *hyper-regeneration*, a phenomenal form of regeneration that takes effect when the creature's hit points drop to 0. Hyper-regeneration is explained on page 43.

Reassembly

Even if you are fortunate enough to sufficiently damage a golem to the point where it can no longer regenerate, it would not be wise to leave any part of the creature intact. If the golem's creator is still among the living (or, the gods forbid, some other person attempts this!), he may well be able to repair his creation.

This process of repair involves two stages: First, the creator reattaches the golem's body parts. Then, he recharges the golem through a burst of energy, which is normally a lightning bolt. Once reanimated, the golem is as powerful as it was before, showing no signs of the damage you and your comrades fought so hard to inflict!

Any disassembled golem—be it flesh, metal, or otherwise—can be put back together and reanimated as long as at least 50% of its original parts remain available and intact (i.e., in excellent condition). Assuming the body is repaired, the only requirement for reanimation is a simple bolt of energy; the life force of the golem is already within its body. The energy—typically a bolt of lightning—merely provides the necessary charge to the golem's "batteries."

February the Fifth—*I have done it! Sadly, however, I am the only remaining member of this expedition, and I owe my success to poor Tomas. It was, after all, his idea to place our weapons in the campfire.*

As he stated in his simple, plainspoken manner: "It works with the wolves. Whenever there's a whole pack of them and only a few of us herders, we heat our weapons right up till they start to glow. You only do it with old weapons, on account of the blades sometimes break, but all you have to do is poke a wolf once and the whole lot of them takes off right quick."

I shall be sure to tell Tomas's family of his sharp thinking when I present my condolences to them. The lad's plan actually worked! When the horrid creature finally came upon us once more, we pulled our weapons from the fire and, our hands wrapped in wool, we faced off against the mighty creature. As soon as I struck the first blow I knew we could defeat the thing, for the weapons burned into the monster's flesh as if it were butter! The battle was bitter, but I prevailed!

Even now the thing's body lies just outside. On the morrow I shall attach it to the sled and bring home my trophy in triumph so that all might witness.

—Final journal entry of Terrence Crannock

Extraordinary Abilities

Golems are extraordinarily diverse creatures, each a unique reflection of its creator's obsessions and desires. As such, almost all golems have certain unusual abilities and powers which other creatures of the same type lack. Most golems have no more than two of these unusual or unique abilities, however. This is fortunate, as any power given to the Created beyond that which they already possess is truly frightening. Such abilities can be very dangerous, but most particularly if they come as a total surprise to the golem hunter.

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I have therefore attempted to compile a representative sampling of the extraordinary abilities that either I or a reliable witness has seen manifested in one of the Created. Most examples are not linked to a golem's physical body per se, but instead derive from the creator's particular reasons for creating the golem. I point this out by way of a warning: Such abilities might apply equally to golems constructed from a material other than flesh (although my research along this vein is admittedly less reliable). I shall also present abilities derived from peculiar body parts—the

Gizella, the young girl I mentioned in my previous entry, lay curled on her straw pallet, the light from the flames bathing her flesh with the ruddiness of life. Relieved, I stepped forward, preparing to wake her. As I reached out, I noticed that Gizella's face was turned toward the fire. But her body was turned toward the doorway opposite!

For the second time in as many days, I was too late. Being careful not to disturb the body, I noted the massive contusions and bruises all along the girl's neck and shoulders. Brushing back her long, pale hair I found what I was seeking: the bruised imprints of the culprit's fingers, starkly malevolent against the pale flesh. Setting to work, I carefully measured the marks. It soon became obvious to me that the fingers belonged to no ordinary mortal. For what human or demihuman has the fingers of a human man on one hand and the fleshy claws of an owlbear on the other?

My horror at the untimely and particularly brutal murder of this unfortunate young girl, not yet seventeen winters old, has only strengthened my resolve. Tomorrow, I will send for Palovian and his group. After the evidence discovered tonight, I am convinced the golem created by Delona is murdering the youth of this village.

—From the journal of Dr. Van Richten

snout from a hound, for example, or the arms of two giant apes. Obviously, the abilities arising from such peculiar parts apply solely to creatures of flesh.

As you read the following descriptions, keep in mind that the list is only representative. It is by no means meant to be an exhaustive compilation of such abilities.

Animate Dead

I once faced a flesh golem who had the ability to animate any corpse it touched. The creature seemed to revel in animating the freshly killed bodies of its foes, and I remember with great sadness having to strike down the animated body of one of my companions in the very same battle in which he was killed.

The animated corpses were not golems, of course, but some sort of lesser undead creatures. Still, it would certainly be possible to be overwhelmed when faced by a large number of such animate dead.

A golem with the animate dead ability can animate and control a number of corpses equaling up to twice its Hit Dice. However, the golem can only give general, empathic commands such as feelings of rage. The golem cannot control exactly who its creatures will feel rage toward. (One exception: They never attack the golem.) Such animated corpses function as zombies.

Cause Despair

An encounter with any golem would bring about some degree of despair, of course. However, in the lower reaches of G'Henna, I encountered a flesh golem who could wield despair as surely as a warrior might wield a sword. This golem's victims were overcome with great melancholy and hopelessness, no matter how bold they might otherwise have been. To trigger the desired effect in a victim, the golem deliberately

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tore away chunks of its own flesh while moving toward its target. What made this terrible sight even more hideous was the creature's constant smile, as of some circus clown, leering evilly beneath its dead eyes.

Victims who succumbed to this despair would find themselves barely able to defend themselves, let alone cast spells or flee. I myself was fortunate enough to stave off this attack long enough to make my escape. Still, a wave of absolute lethargy and apathy came over me, and it nearly drowned my will.

Golems with this power can cause despair up to three times per day. To do so, the golem must consciously exert its will while simultaneously moaning, ripping at its own flesh, laughing, or performing some other action designed to horrify observers.

Anyone looking upon the golem must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic or be overwhelmed by apathy and despair. Affected individuals can only defend themselves, and may not take any offensive actions or attempt to flee at a rate faster than a slow walk. This effect lasts as long as the golem remains in the victim's sight.

Cause Horror

Hataras the Quiet once told me of a golem whose hideous laughter nearly drove him to madness. The dwarf shook with fear as he related the tale, and he spoke in no more than a whisper. And this was nearly a year after the incident! Indeed, he said he could not bring himself to leave his home for several weeks following the horrible encounter, and that the hideous laughter still echoed in his nightmares whenever his weary mind drifted into sleep.

I too have faced such a gibbering creature. No words could describe the chilling sensation that its maniacal laughter produced in me. Hardened warriors may faint and the most

faithful of priests despair upon hearing such a sound, but all who do are sorely put not to give in to its debilitating terror.

Anyone hearing the gibbering golem's laugh must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic with a -2 penalty. Those who fail suffer the effects of a failed fear check.

Climb Sheer Surfaces

I have both heard and read accounts of golems who can climb sheer walls as easily you or I might walk across a room. While I personally have not witnessed such a phenomenon, the trait described reminds me of the vampire's ability to scale vertical surfaces, and I would not be surprised to learn that golems are equally adept.

Golems with this ability have an 85% chance to climb sheer surfaces (as would a thief). Some flesh golems also have other thieflike abilities. Such golems should be treated as 5th-level thieves when such abilities are gauged.

Diseased Touch

It is possible for a golem to confer a highly contagious rotting disease with no more than its touch. Such a touch wreaks hideous results upon living flesh, and I am glad to say that I have witnessed the effects only once. If my experience and gathered accounts are correct, a golem with this ability secretes some sort of virulent pus from its pores. As a result, the creature's skin gains a moist, pustulant coating, which harbors the virus. The golem itself is of course immune to the effects of this disease, whose symptoms included blackened buboes (better known as pustules), high fever, delirium, and eventual death. The only treatment known to be effective is the priest spell *cure disease*.

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I pray that you never run into such a creature yourself. However, if you notice that the skin of the golem you fight seems to constantly glisten, be extremely wary of touching the moisture—lest you contract this dread affliction!

Victims touched by the golem must make a saving throw vs. disease. Those who fail this saving throw will be stricken ill, losing 25% of their original hit points per turn. When a victim's hit points reach 0, the character falls unconscious. The victim will then lose 1 point of Constitution per day until cured (or until reaching 0 Constitution and death). Constitution loss is permanent. No normal or magical healing short of a *cure disease* or *heal* spell will cure this terrible affliction.

Energy Drain

This is one of many golem abilities that instill weakness and terror in those who face the creature. A golem with such a draining power weakens the victim on touch. The loss reflects a waning of the victim's spirit more than any diminished physical capacity. Yet this touch can be so devastating that the victim never fully recovers from the onslaught. Perhaps he will fall prey to illness more easily in the future, or simply feel a lack of energy and vibrancy. With hard work and tremendous discipline, however, much of the results of this touch can be relieved—as I well know from my own experience.

When the golem touches its victim, it can drain 1d6 hit points. There is no saving throw against this effect. Through both normal or magical healing, the victim can recover half the lost hit points (rounded down). Remaining hit points are permanently lost. The golem can use this ability up to 3 times a day.

Hyper-Regeneration

I have watched in horror as golems that were supposedly killed only minutes before have risen anew, in perfect health, to strike again. I can only assume that certain golems possess some sort of survival reflex, which causes a sudden upswing in their already rapid regenerative abilities. Thank the gods the monsters do not seem capable of this sort of healing at will; it only seems to occur after the creature is felled.

If what I surmise about golems is true, at least some of these creatures have a unique ability to “hyper-regenerate.” This phenomenon might be best likened to our own bodies' ability to produce a sudden surge of adrenalin in a time of great stress. These surges can, at times, be so profound they enable us to perform heroic feats normally outside our capability. A young mother, for example, who otherwise struggles to carry a load of firewood, may heft a massive tree trunk if it has fallen and trapped her child.



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Certain monks and other ascetics can learn, through rigorous training, to control their adrenaline surges and other physiological changes. However, I have neither seen nor heard of a golem able to do the same with its regenerative fail-safe. Pray to the gods that this is always the case. A golem with such abilities under its conscious control would be nigh onto unstoppable.

This accelerated rate of regeneration occurs when the golem's hit points drop below 0. At this point the regeneration rate rises to 10 points per round, and lasts until the golem is fully healed. The golem may rise at any time during this process (once its hit points are above 0); however, the creature usually waits until it has fully recovered before doing so.

Hyper-regeneration is one of the abilities that can be used for maximum scare effect on players. There is nothing more frightening than having the monster you just "killed" stand up in perfect condition a few moments later!

Spell-like Abilities

No golem can cast spells. However, the "stench of decay" described below is a prominent example of a spell-like ability—an extraordinary ability which mimics a particular wizard spell. It is only one of many, in a category that varies greatly in scope. Other possible spell-like abilities—i.e., those of which I am currently aware—are detailed below. Typically, an individual creature will boast only one or two such powers. Further, the golem cannot use a spell-like power as often as it pleases; three uses per day is the usual maximum, though some are limited to just one occurrence.

I believe such powers reflect the particular creator's skewed desires or obsessions. For instance, I have heard tell of a golem who could cause darkness on even the brightest of sunlit days. Its creator apparently had a pathological fear of the dark. Additionally, I once read of a

golem whose creator longed to be taken seriously by those who mocked him. The golem he later constructed could cause those who gazed upon it to begin laughing uncontrollably for minutes on end. Of course, this was not the laughter of harmless amusement—rather the racking, gasping sounds of a victim barely able to breathe due to the terrible laughter arising from his own throat.

It seems that a particular golem's extraordinary or unique abilities are more often than not mockeries of the creator's true desires. Ironic, is it not?

A golem's spell-like abilities can mimic any of a number of 1st- to 3rd-level wizard spells. The DM should feel free to choose any such ability that seems fitting for a golem of his or her own design. Though Van Richten suggests a maximum of three uses, that is exceptional. As a rule, a golem should be able to use its spell-like ability only once per day.

Stench of Decay

Cyrilla, the Vistani woman whose story I related earlier in this volume, told of the clay golem Vassa having a terrible odor. The stench was enough to make Cyrilla's eyes water, and she told me it was difficult to breathe while close to the golem. Cyrilla described the odor as a stench of decay, and I believe this to be an appropriate description.

When fighting a golem with such a stench it is wise to wrap a cloth about your nose and mouth; this can lessen the distracting and debilitating effects of the stench.

When faced with such a stench, victims are allowed a saving throw vs. poison. Those who fail are affected as per the 3rd-level wizard spell *stinking cloud*.

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Transferable Telepathy

As is described earlier in this chapter, all golems born of obsession have a profound telepathic link with their creator. This link is so deep that it allows the golem to know the creator better than he knows himself, sensing his deepest fears and desires. It also allows the golem to speak into the creator's mind at will.

The information I am about to relate stems from an extremely old tale, and I was unable to verify the source. Nonetheless, I find the possibility it presents so disturbing that I cannot in all good conscience ignore it. The fragmented tale describes a golem that could transfer its telepathic ability. Once the creature's creator was dead, it found another parental figure to latch onto! Of course, this unwitting individual failed to meet the golem's expectations, and he, too, met with a violent end.

According to the story, once the golem became linked to an individual, it would begin speaking into the poor victim's mind, causing that person to believe he was losing his sanity. Eventually, the link ended with the death of the new "parent," so being chosen by this golem was, in essence, a death sentence for the unsuspecting victim. How the golem chose its victims is uncertain.

A golem with this ability can sequentially use its power of specific telepathy. Once a golem connects to a new individual, it cannot simply decide to drop the link, however. The only way for the link to end is through death—either the golem's or its victim's.

Unusual Powers from Odd Parts

Flesh golems also may gain special abilities from unusual parts used in their construction. Whether from ego or as a result of twisted obsessions that we cannot begin to comprehend, some creators choose to assemble their

We were just bringing in the day's catch, and I remember spotting a particularly fine halibut in the net when the thing swooped down on us. At first I thought maybe it was one of those gargoyle things, but it didn't look like any gargoyle I'd ever seen. What it looked like was a nightmare come to life.

It's funny, but I can hardly seem to remember its face. What I remember best is the smell of the brine and the rush of the wind, and poor Neddie-boy's wide-open eyes right before it took him. I mean, the thing just snatched him up right out of the boat. Then it flew higher and higher. It had leathery wings, and its body was like something one of my kids would have stuck together. You know, like a doll made from the wrong sized parts. I don't even know why it took Neddie. I mean—it wasn't for food. And it didn't even seem to want him. It just flew up high and then dropped him onto a rock—like it had been some kind of experiment or something! Then it flew off. Neddie sure didn't deserve that. . . . Heck, nobody does.

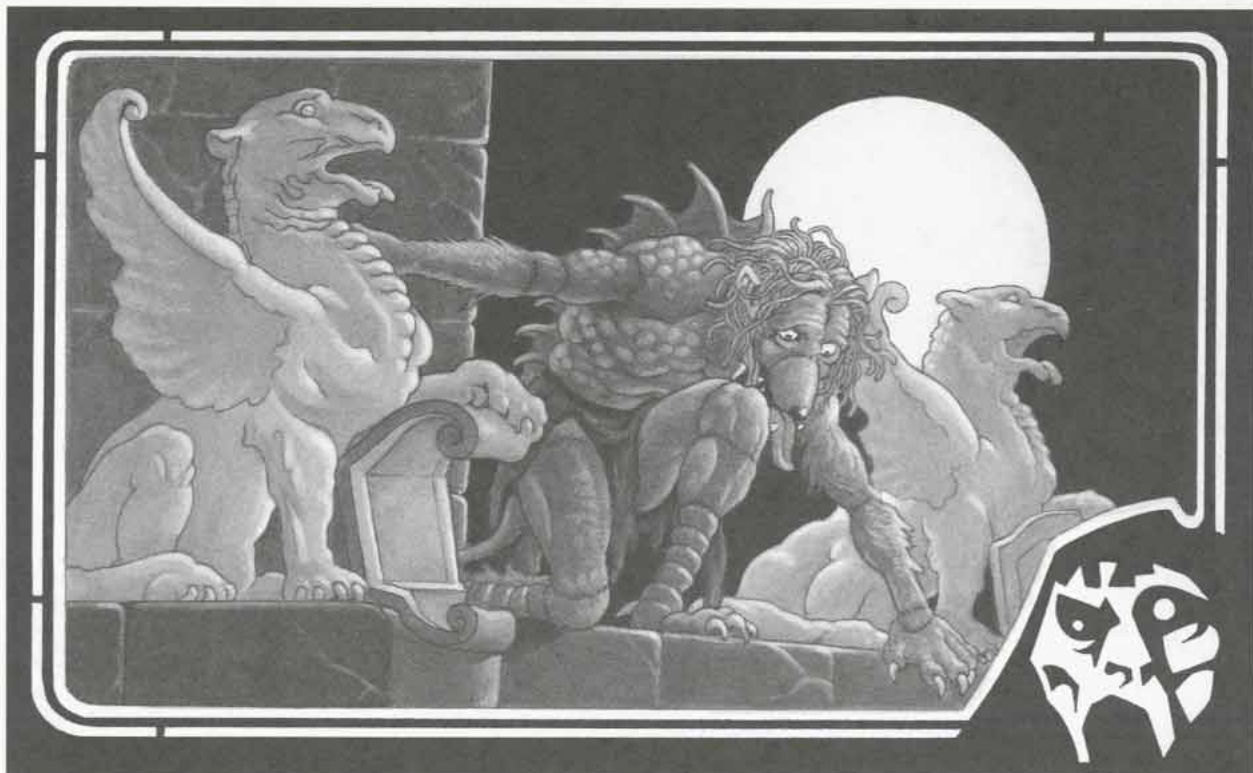
—Account of an anonymous fisherman

golems from a variety of human, demihuman, animal, and even monstrous body parts—until the result makes an already startling creature truly bizarre.

It is essential for the golem hunter to be able to accurately predict the abilities of the foe from an analysis of its appearance. To aid in this effort, the abilities derived from a representative sampling of the innumerable possible body parts are discussed below. Bear in mind that these examples barely scratch the surface of possible golem anatomy, and recall that it is always better to overestimate than to underestimate your foe!

■ **Limbs.** Both the number and the type of limbs that the creator attaches to a golem affect its powers and capabilities. This is particularly true of limbs that offered the "original owner" special

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abilities or provided modes of travel. For example, I have heard rumors of a peculiar creature inhabiting the jungles of Sri Raji. If the reports are accurate, the creature primarily travels by brachiating—that is, by swinging from tree limb to tree limb—through use of its long forelimbs, at an exceedingly rapid rate. These unusual limbs, presumably taken from some primate, grant the golem the power to utilize this swift and silent means of travel, and to attack its victims from above with little if any warning. Apparently, the creature even boasts a prehensile tail with which it hangs from above!

The potential combinations are almost boundless. I know of at least two tales of a golem with the wings of a giant eagle—the golem could fly. If a golem flies, we can assume this ability has a dramatic effect on the monster's choice of lair. Unfortunately, it also hinders our ability to both locate and destroy such a creature.

A golem with the body of a horse would move extremely rapidly and have the advantage of

powerful rear hoof attacks as well. Readers who use their imaginations can surely come up with a number of other possible abilities as well. What is important is that the hunter always attempt to remain open and flexible in his thinking about golem abilities.

■ **Sensory Organs.** A creator often chooses to use eyes, ears, or other sensory organs from nonhuman sources for reasons other than aesthetics. Those delicately shaped elf eyes which “grace” the golem’s brow grant the golem not only visual acuity but the ability to see into the infrared spectrum as well. The use of ears from species with exceptionally keen hearing grant that same sharpness to the golem.

A golem that once dwelled near Dervich was reputed to have tracked its prey by scent, with the aid of the bloodhound’s snout grafted to its humanoid countenance. The hunter should always assume that the golem’s senses are far keener than his own.

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■ **Other Body Parts.** In addition to these relatively mundane organs and limbs, many fantastical appendages could be attached to the golem. Astonby of the Oaks once wrote of his encounter with a flesh golem equipped with the eyes of a giant fly and the stinger of a giant scorpion. These appendages gave the golem a nearly 360-degree range of vision, as well as an additional poisoned attack. I've also heard of a golem with the tongue of a giant frog. Apparently, the golem used the tongue to snag small prey, which it then proceeded to ravage. It also used the tongue to gain a strangle hold on larger victims.

While the list could continue indefinitely, these examples provide the reader with a good idea of the range of physical combinations possible among the Created. I find it ironic that a mad scientist might labor year after year, performing countless dissections in his quest for knowledge concerning life, then ultimately stitch together a creature about whose abilities he knows almost nothing. Indeed, many creators die at the moment they first glimpse the true potential of the golem—at the moment their creation turns against them and strikes them down.

For DMs constructing a unique golem, peculiar body parts offer nearly boundless possibilities. The powers arising from such parts can truly surprise and frighten players. Below are several examples of the abilities which flesh golems might gain from exotic parts.

Gargoyle Wings: These wings allow the golem to fly at a rate of 15 (D or E). Additionally, the golem appears even more terrible, causing a -1 penalty to any fear checks made in its presence.

Baboon's Tail: This prehensile tail enables the golem to swing from tree limb to tree limb at a rate of 12.

Giant Scorpion's Tail: This tail gives the golem an additional attack. If the attack hits, it causes 1d4 points of damage and the victim

must successfully save vs. poison or lose an additional 2d4 hit points. The venom of the golem's tail can be used only three times a day.

Mage's Brain: A golem with a mage's brain can cast one 1st-level spell per day. This is a variation on (or rationale for) the spell-like abilities of some golems.

Basilisk's Eyes: These eyes do not grant the golem the ability to petrify its opponents. However, they do manage to force anyone looking at the golem's face to successfully save vs. paralyzation or be unable to attack for one round due to a sudden, short-lived paralysis.

Blood of a Cheetah: This blood allows the golem to triple its movement rate for 1d4 rounds. This ability is usable once per day.

Chapter IV: UNUSUAL MATERIALS



T

he untaught peasant beheld the elements around him, and was acquainted with their practical purposes. The most learned philosopher knew little more. He had partially unveiled the face of Nature, but her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery.

—Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,
Frankenstein

In this chapter I shall discuss those rare creatures made of substances other than flesh. I have reliable information that each of the materials herein has been used in the construction of at least one golem. In some cases, I can provide firsthand information. In others, I can only provide secondhand information and my own hypotheses.

Although I cannot be entirely certain of these secondhand sources, I firmly believe it is better to err by offering the reader some potentially false or misleading information. It would be tragically irresponsible of me to hold back some information just because I believe it may hold relatively little merit or even be entirely specious. I will not make for you a decision on which your very life, and the lives of your companions, may rest.

That said, let us begin our examination.

Bone

One might imagine that a bone golem is simple to assemble; bone is quite easy to obtain, after all, and it does not degrade as swiftly as flesh. However, while a flesh golem can be constructed from the dead, a bone golem must be fashioned from the *undead* (or formerly so). By all accounts, bone golems are only viable when constructed from once-animate skeletons that have been defeated in combat. Further, at least ten different skeletons must be

This chapter describes golems created by obsessive nonplayer characters (NPCs) in Ravenloft. As such, they should be rare and unique, like the characters who fashioned them.

These unusual creatures do not necessarily match the descriptions in the *Monstrous Manual* or the RAVENLOFT® appendix to the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*®. For example, the golem made of metal as described below does not precisely match the description of the iron golem in the *Monstrous Manual*, though strong similarities remain. Further, the common clay golem can only be created by a priest of good alignment. In contrast, the monster presented here might be the creation of a mad sculptor who fashioned his vision of the perfect woman, and then brought his sculpture to life.

Note that basic ability scores are given for each of the golem types in this chapter. These are *base scores* only. The DM is encouraged to modify scores as he sees fit, depending on the specific type of stone used in a stone golem, the pattern of glass used in a glass golem, type of wood, and so forth.

Potential strengths and vulnerabilities of each type of golem are also mentioned. The list is by no means exhaustive. In particular, any golem could boast one or two of the extraordinary abilities listed in the previous chapter (the only exception being an ability based on the use of flesh, of course). Further, a golem might be subject to an unusual zeitgeber (see page 35), and be vulnerable to a particular blessed weapon (see page 29). As always, you should feel free to create unique golems and adjust the experience point totals accordingly. Match your golem to the idiosyncracies of its maker, using the suggestions in this chapter as examples of the wide range of possibilities.

Note that any material-specific strengths and weaknesses listed in this chapter are in addition the features common to *all* golems, which can be summed up as follows:

- Can only be struck by an enchanted weapon (+2 or better for every golem noted except straw and flesh)
- Immune to toxins and disease
- Immune to mind- and life-affecting spells
- Gain a +4 bonus to saving throws against physical damage
- Do not age or breathe

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combined to create the monster. I cannot say what necessitates such measures; I only know that without them, the would-be creator is unable to fashion a thing as powerful as a golem.

Bone has a number of drawbacks when compared to flesh (which, of course, might be viewed as advantages by a golem hunter). First, this material is not as adaptable or resilient. Thus, bone golems do not appear to have the same level of regenerative ability as do flesh golems. Second, I believe that bone may actually become somewhat brittle over time, which suggests a susceptibility to shattering attacks.

A devoted golem hunter and adventurer of my acquaintance, Hataras the Quiet, has noted that blunt weapons seem to have a far greater effect on golems constructed of bone than do swords and other slashing weapons. This makes sense, as most skeletal creatures are not particularly susceptible to cutting attacks.

Clay

Clay can be found within many riverbanks and cliff sides throughout much of the land. Normally, this material is used in the construction of pots, urns, and other items of great use to all. Unfortunately, this pliant material can also be formed into the body of a golem.

When used in the creation of golems, clay provides a strong, solid body. Several years ago, while battling a clay golem in the fens near Rivalis in the West, I and my companions were horrified to discover that traditional weapons have little effect upon the soft clay. Our swords and maces appeared to damage the golem not one whit. Fortunately for us, Antalya, our mage, used several fire-based spells on the creature. Although the flames themselves did little damage to the monstrosity, the heat from the fire apparently hardened the clay such that the creature's flesh did not dissipate the force of our physical attacks.

Bone golems can be hit only by a weapon of +2 or greater enchantment. When struck, a golem has a 10% chance to trap the weapon within its rib cage. An opponent must make a successful bend bars check to withdraw the weapon.

Like skeletons, these golems suffer only half damage from edged or piercing weapons. However, a *shatter* spell makes a bone golem more vulnerable; while the spell is in effect, damage suffered from weapon attacks doubles. (Thus, edged weapons cause full damage, while blunt weapons cause double.) The golem is allowed a save vs. spell to avoid this effect.

Bone golems are immune to cold but vulnerable to fire. They regenerate at only half the normal rate from such attacks, so a golem with a Constitution of 20 would regenerate 1 hit point every 12 turns.

Bone golems animated by powerful wizards can emit a laugh so horrifying it prompts both fear and horror checks. Failing one check causes *paralyzation* for 2–12 rounds; failing both causes death. Most bone golems animated through obsession can also emit such a laugh. However, the creatures described in the RAVENLOFT® appendix to the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® use this ability once every three rounds. Those animated through obsession are limited to three uses per day. Ironically, this can make them more powerful in combat, since they can use the power in consecutive rounds.

Golem, Bone: AL N; AC 0; MV 12; HD 14; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 3d8; SA see above; SD see above; MR Nil; SZ M; ML Fearless (20); XP 18,000. Str 19; Dex 18; Con 20; Int 12; Wis 2; Cha 3.

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The clay golems outlined in the *Monstrous Manual* are fashioned by lawful good priests. They are clumsy and unintelligent, and they may become rampaging berserkers should they break free of their masters' control. But a golem molded from clay by an obsessed creator can differ markedly, for it is given life and intelligence by the mysterious powers of Ravenloft.

A Ravenloft clay golem can be struck only by blunt weapons of +2 or better enchantment, such as hammers or maces. Due to the pliant nature of its body, the creature normally takes half damage from all weapons. On an attack roll of 20, the golem can envelop an opponent, inflicting 1d6 points of damage per round. Only a successful bend bars roll will free the victim. (If it should suit the creator, an unusual clay golem might also elongate its limbs, enabling it to attack opponents up to 20 feet distant.)

Ravenloft clay golems take full damage from both heat- and cold-based spells. These magics make the flesh somewhat brittle. For three rounds following such an attack, the clay golem takes *full* damage from all weapons of +2 or greater enchantment.

Like any clay golem, a Ravenloft creation can be driven back 120 feet by a *move earth* spell, suffering 3–12 (3d12) points of damage. *Disintegrate* slows the creature for 1–6 rounds and causes 1–12 (1d12) points of damage. An *earthquake* spell focused on the creature can halt it for a turn and inflict 5–50 (5d10) points of damage.

After a round of combat, a clay golem can cast *haste* on itself for 3 rounds. It can do this once per day.

Golem, Clay: AL N; AC 7; MV 7; HD 11; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 3d10; SA hug; SD +2 or better weapon to hit; MR Nil; SZ L; ML Fearless (20); XP 11,000. Str 20; Dex 16; Con 20; Int 10; Wis 2; Cha 5.

Setting to work with renewed vigor, we managed to shatter the golem. Our stalwart fighter Porren was still celebrating his shattering blow when I first noticed the clay begin to soften and reform. Several members of our group were greatly injured at the time, so we decided it to be the better part of valor to retreat and plan our strategy anew. Unfortunately, we could not find the Golem of the Fens, as locals call it, again. For all I know it is still wandering those very fens to this day.

Glass

According to some sages I have consulted, a powerful wizard or priest might fashion a golem out of stained glass. Such creatures take the form of a knight wielding a deadly sword. While I have never encountered such a monster personally, I have seen evidence of another unique creature of the same material, which was clearly the result of its maker's obsession.

When I began my quest to thwart evil long ago, I heard several legends about a terrifying "lady of glass." I never found any reliable evidence, however, so I discounted such tales as mere fancy. That was before I discovered a firsthand account of precisely such a golem, purely by accident.

I was visiting a remote monastery in Darkon to learn more about liches—those dreadful, undead mages. The monks had graciously consented to give me access to their old records. While the information I sought eluded me, I did discover an intriguing letter among some faded documents. It told of a master glass craftsman with a burning hatred for priests. Thus did I uncover the following description of a lovely golem made of glass.

... and thus we ended the holy service consecrating our new chapel to our most wondrous and revered Lady of the Solemn Vows. What happened next was so foul, so horrid, that my hand quavers even as I write to

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you, my lord. I beg you to forgive this failing, but I have slept little since that dreadful dawn, and I can still see the terrifying beauty of the thing in my mind's eye.

As I described to you in some detail in my previous missive, the entire front wall of the new edifice was a paean to our serene Lady, she of the True Word. It was built entirely of glass by a single craftsman who worked ceaselessly to finish his masterpiece, forgoing even sleep. As the last notes of music faded to quiet that fateful morn, the dawn's light touched the wall of glass. The colors were dazzling, and I wept at the beauty I had been blessed to see. Now I wish I had been blinded by that same beauty, as then I would not have seen the deaths of so many good folk!

Seconds after the chapel was suffused by the colored light, the image of our Lady, some twenty feet in height, broke away from the wall and began her attack. Some of us cast ourselves to the ground, certain we had trespassed against our goddess in some manner.

But I saw the tiny form of the craftsman standing in the doorway—his face red, yellow, and green in the reflected light. Such an expression! His face was suffused with such twisted hatred that I could not bear to look on it, any more than on the violent deaths of so many of my fellows. I am ashamed to admit I fled in the face of such horror, but . . .

The tale of the golem ends there. I believe this to be a fairly accurate account. The chapel itself was surely destroyed in the attack. Although I have been unable to find its exact location, I believe it may have once stood in what is now the Mount Nirka region of Darkon. It is probable that the golem is yet in existence to this very day, as there was a report of just such a creature being sighted no more than twenty years ago.

Although information is minimal, I would think it likely any golem of glass would favor slashing attacks. It might also be able to use certain properties of glass to its advantage, such as heat conduction and the like.



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The RAVENLOFT® appendix to the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® introduces a golem of stained glass, which takes the form of a knight and can be fashioned by high-level priests and wizards. Like such golems, the glass golem born of obsession can unleash a *prismatic spray* (see the spell in the *Player's Handbook*) once every 3 rounds. Additionally, such a glass golem may be able to focus a burning ray through its body at targets up to 100 feet distant, causing 3d8 points of damage. A successful saving throw vs. paralysis halves this damage. The burning ray attack can be used only once per day, and the golem must be exposed to direct sunlight.

Regardless of their origin, glass golems can be struck only by blunt weapons of +2 or greater enchantment. Due to their relative fragility, glass golems suffer double damage from such attacks. Additionally, a *shatter* spell weakens them to the point where melee attacks have a percentage chance equal to twice the points of damage inflicted of instantly slaying the golem.

Golem, Glass: AL N; AC 4; MV 12; HD 9; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2d12; SA see above; SD +2 or better weapon to hit; MR Nil; SZ M; ML 20; XP 6,000. Str 18; Dex 17; Con 20; Int 12; Wis 2; Cha 12.

Metal

I have heard tales of golems made of iron, though I have never faced one. Presumably, almost any metal could be used. Yet the difficulty in procuring enough of a particular metal and then working it into a suitable form is prohibitive for most individuals. Thus, metallic golems are among the rarest of all.

It is fortunate, indeed, that the above is true, for it would seem plausible that a golem constructed of metal would be so tough as to be

nigh unto indestructible. However, the former supposition may also imply that these golems are not as easily reanimated as the golems fashioned from other materials.

If you are ever so unfortunate as to face a metallic foe, I would advise relying on cleverness and trickery, as opposed to brutish physical assaults, to defeat your unnatural foe.

Unusual metallic golems can only be struck by weapons of +2 enchantment or better. (Iron golems can be struck only by +3 or greater weapons. See the *Monstrous Manual* for details.) All magical weapons inflict only 2 points of damage to the metallic monster created through obsession, not including strength and magical bonuses. Fire does not normally damage metal golems. (In fact, for the common iron golem, magical fire actually heals 1 hit point per Hit Die of damage; DMs may wish to adapt this ability for other metal golems, too.)

Metal golems are incapable of *hyper-regeneration*. Additionally, electrical attacks slow such creatures for 3 rounds. If the creature is struck by an electrical attack while touching water, triple damage is incurred.

Golem, Metal: AL N; AC 3; MV 6; HD 18; THAC0 3; #AT 1; Dmg 4d10; SA Nil; SD +2 or better to hit; MR Nil; SZ L; ML 20; XP 15,000. Str 24; Dex 17; Con 20; Int 9; Wis 2; Cha 7.

Stone

This material suffers much the same strengths and weaknesses of the metal mentioned above. However, if the constructor is both patient and skilled, stone is often a far less costly material with which to work.

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According to the noted dwarven scholar Abordicus Slategrinder, several appearances of stone golems have been recorded in his homeland of Lamordia. Abordicus describes these golems as extremely slow, methodical, and almost invulnerable. Indeed, when faced with stone golem bent on their destruction, one dwarven claim became so desperate they triggered an avalanche to bury the creature. In the process, over half their town was destroyed.

Golem hunters must sometimes take such extreme measures to rid the world of the Created.

Only weapons of +2 or better enchantment can strike a stone golem born of obsession in Ravenloft. Further, edged and piercing weapons cause only 1 hit point of damage, not including strength and magical bonuses. Unusual golems constructed from slate or other brittle stone take double damage from magical bludgeoning attacks.

Like any common stone golem, up to three times per day the golem born of obsession can use *slow* on its opponents. Stone golems built from igneous rock inflict an additional 1d8 points of damage per attack due to the stone's jagged edges.

A *rock to mud* spell slows the stone golem for 2d6 rounds. (The reverse, *mud to rock*, heals all damage!) A *stone to flesh* spell makes the golem vulnerable to all normal attacks during the next round—excluding spell effects that do not involve the loss of hit points.

Golem, Stone: AL N; AC 5; MV 6; HD 14; THAC0 7; #AT 1; Dmg 3d8; SA slows opponent; SD see above; MR Nil; SZ L; ML Fearless (20); XP 9,000. Str 22; Dex 17; Con 20; Int 9; Wis 2; Cha 8.



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Straw

Though magically animated scarecrows have been known to stagger through the countryside, bent on murder, straw is rarely employed in the construction of an intelligent golem. When such a material is used, it is always due to its peculiar significance to the creator.

I have heard of one such occurrence of a straw golem, however. The halfling farmers residing near Delagia in Darkon have long believed that an intelligent creature made entirely of straw wanders the plowed fields of their countryside. As legend has it, a farmer by the name of Casdin refused to pay the taxes required of him by local law. After months of this flagrantly illegal behavior, the governor sent several members of the local guard to either collect the monies due or take Casdin into custody. The men disappeared.



The creature outlined here should not be confused with the scarecrow described in the RAVENLOFT® appendix to the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® (even though the scarecrow is classed as a relatively weak form of golem in the *Monstrous Manual*). The straw golem born of obsession is immune to all fire-based attacks. It can summon a flock of ravens, which will attack the golem's opponents. The ravens surround the golem's opponents, blinding and pecking at them. These golems also have a 90% chance to surprise opponents when hiding in a field or similar environment.

Weapons of +1 or greater enchantment are needed to hit a straw golem. (Note that most golems given life by the mysterious powers of Ravenloft are immune to +1 weapons; the straw golem is weaker.) Magical edged weapons cause double damage to these golems. Additionally, if a straw golem is hit by water, it is slowed for 3 rounds (as per the spell).

Golem; Straw: AL N; AC 5; MV 12; HD 9; THAC0 11; #AT 2; Dmg 2d6/2d6; SA raven flock; SD immune to fire, +1 or better weapon to hit; MR Nil; SZ M; ML 20; XP 3,000. Str 18; Dex 19; Con 20; Int 12; Wis 2; Cha 6.

A larger group was immediately dispatched to apprehend the farmer, now suspected of the far greater crime of murder. Casdin reportedly went quietly, insisting all the while the men had never reached his establishment. This seemed unlikely, and Casdin was placed in a cell in the guardhouse for the night. That very night both the men guarding Casdin, the governor, and the farmer himself disappeared.

Enraged, the governor's lieutenant sent the captain of the guard and ten of his men to retake Casdin. When the group reached Casdin's farmhouse, they discovered it had

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burned to the ground. The acrid scent of burning flesh drew the guards to the barn, which was untouched by the fire. Within lay the body of Casdin, burned but still recognizable. His fists, cut and scraped, were tightly clutching a bunch of straw.

Though they were reluctant to unbar their door, the neighboring family was questioned later that day. They described what they had seen: a scarecrow carrying Casdin's limp form from his burning home. The creature's straw head was wreathed in flames as it headed into the barn, where Casdin's body was eventually found.

Later, it was also noted that several pieces of straw were found in the governor's bedroom. No other similarity linked the missing governor to the charred corpse of Casdin.

To this day, local farmers refuse to place scarecrows in their fields, lest Casdin's creature take umbrage and burn their own fields and homes to the ground.

As I noted at the onset of this section, the golem I have just described is not a magically animated scarecrow. The golem is a vastly superior opponent. To distinguish which foe you've encountered, I suggest you examine the head. In all likelihood, the straw golem born of obsession will be constructed solely of straw, though the material may be stuffed into clothing. In contrast, the evil scarecrow's head will almost assuredly be a pumpkin or gourd. Truth surely is stranger than fiction, is it not?

Wood

The time-honored skill of woodcarving continues to be a common practice in my homeland of Darkon, as well as in villages and towns throughout the land. Most carvers use this skill to create items ranging from the most practical of bowls to the most fanciful of sculptures. Unfortunately, I have heard that some carvers have turned this same skill toward the creation of wood golems.

Although wood golems tend to be smaller in stature than most, they are still vicious

The wood golem introduced here is not the Ravenloft doll golem. The latter creature is a toy which may or may not be made of wood. (Most doll golems, in fact, are stuffed animals or dolls of mixed materials.)

Wood golems do not bite or cause their victims to laugh uncontrollably, as doll golems can. However, the creatures do boast an unusual splintering attack. By smashing a limb against a solid object, a wood golem can cause 1d4 large splinters to fly from its body (range 10 feet). If a splinter hits its target, it burrows into the flesh, causing 1d4 points of damage per round until removed. Further, unlike doll golems, wood golems are not *slowed* by the *warp wood* spell. In fact, the creatures can themselves *warp wood*, three times per day.

Most wood golems can only be struck by weapons of +2 or better enchantment. If the golem is constructed of petrified wood, however, a +3 weapon or better is required. Magical fire attacks cause double damage. Additionally, these golems suffer twice the usual amount of damage from magically summoned insects (e.g., *summon swarm*). Golems made from ironwood are *slowed* for 3 rounds by electrical attacks.

Golem, Wood: AL N; AC 6; MV 12; HD 12; THACO 8; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8/2d8; SA splinters; SD +2 or better weapon to hit; MR Nil; SZ M; ML 20; XP 6,000. Str 19; Dex 18; Con 20; Int 9; Wis 2; Cha 7.

opponents and should not be discounted in combat. Some wood golems are said to have a painful splintering attack in which they drive wickedly pointed shards of wood into the victim's flesh. The shards supposedly work inward, towards the victim's heart, inflicting additional damage upon the sufferer.

Chapter V: GOLEMS AND MAGIC



he young priestess Irena was too naive for her own good. In an effort to understand the creature's torment, she attempted to look into its mind. 'Twas then, I believe, that she began to lose her own. Of course, when the object of her pity used its hideous claws to pluck out her lover's heart, her miserable fate was sealed.

—Fragment of a diary

The magical abilities of golems are as diverse as the creatures themselves. Further, there is much variation in the effect that magic has upon them—so much so that I hesitate to put forth my observations on the subject, lest my words be taken as fact.

Thus, the information in this section should be viewed as educated assumptions, studied estimation, and cautious advice.

Magical Powers

While some golems have innate abilities that mimic certain spells (see Chapter III), I have never heard of a golem that could actually *cast* a spell of any kind. What an unspeakable horror such a creature would be! Fortunately, the Created seem physically and mentally incapable of the complex manipulation of magical energies performed by wizards and priests. True, golems can be extremely cunning in their thinking. Nevertheless, their brains lack the necessary flexibility, if you will, as well as the high levels of reasoning required to properly channel mystical forces.

Some sages have presented a second theory to account for this lack of spellcasting ability. This theory holds that the same energies which imbue life and superhuman strength in the golem's body actually "overcharge" the delicate parts of the brain and body which allow a mage to channel and weave magic.

Regardless of which theory (if either) is valid—or if, as I believe, some combination of the two is the cause—I feel it is safe to state that golems do not cast spells. However, as I have noted, a number of golems do exhibit certain limited spell-like powers, such as the ability to slow their opponents or cause paralyzing fear. Normally a golem will only have one or at most two of such abilities, if indeed it has any at all. Still, a pessimistic attitude is probably best when considering the various abilities of such diverse creatures.

On that note, I shall turn the tables on the golem, and discuss the possible effects that spells cast by would-be golem hunters may have upon it. Be certain that any spellcasters of your acquaintance are aware of this information, for it may prove vital in keeping you and your companions alive. Thanks for much of this material are due to several mages and priests—brave folk who generously shared their expertise in hope of aiding others embroiled in the war against evil.

Spell Effects

Due to the impenetrable nature of their minds and bodies, golems are immune to many spells. In particular, they resist all efforts to bend their will; they cannot be charmed or lulled to sleep. As they do not need to breathe, they cannot be harmed by magic affecting the respiratory system. And since they do not age, they are immune to most life-altering spells, including those which ordinarily cause disease. Finally, they sustain far less damage in combat than we mortals do, and are completely immune to cold-based and electrical spell attacks.

Nonetheless, magic is one of the foremost weapons in the golem hunter's arsenal. Certain familiar spells have particularly devastating results when used against the Created.

In the following section, I shall discuss selected spells that function in perhaps unexpected ways (or not at all) when applied to the Created.

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Whatever their construction, golems are immune to spells affecting the mind (e.g., *charm*, *sleep*, *hold*). They are also immune to spells affecting the respiratory system and other life functions that are alien to golems. Exceptions are noted in appropriate MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® entry. Remember that all members of the Created gain a +4 saving throw bonus against any spell causing physical damage.

Wizard Spells

It seems that “heavy duty” spells, especially flame-based castings, offer the most sure-fire means of damaging the Created. However, spells should always be selected with care; the best magical arsenal includes a broad range of physically damaging effects.

The reasons for the caution above by now may seem obvious, but I would rather repeat myself than gloss over important information too readily. *All golems are different*. Although the details I shall impart here are given in good faith, dear reader, and seem to be generally true, this by no means indicates that the golem you face will not have capabilities, defenses, and even vulnerabilities different from those I explicate herein. Simply put, when faced with a specific threat, generalities do not make the strongest of shields.

Illusion/Phantasm: Magics relying directly on tricking the mind normally do not work on the Created. Thus spells such as *phantasmal force*, *hypnotic pattern*, *fear*, and the like are utterly worthless against these foes.

An exception to this rule seems to be spells causing *invisibility*. Although it is not exactly clear why such magics are effective against the Created when other illusions are not, I theorize that these spells in some way physically act upon the subject turned invisible, not the mind of the viewer. Or it may be—as the great mage Hermaine Gingold suggests—that the *invisibility*

spell acts as a filter, physically enveloping the invisible subject and directing the viewer's attention around and away from it. Whatever the truth, golems cannot see invisible opponents any better than we do ourselves—which is to say, not at all.

Charm Spells: As with the illusion spells above, charm spells such as *sleep*, *hold monster*, *charm monster*, and the like rely on affecting the mind of the subject, and thus are useless against the golem. The minds of the Created seem impervious to all forms of mental manipulation.

Animate Dead: This spell does not affect the Created.

Contagion: Golems are not subject to disease of any kind; hence, this spell has no effect.

Detect Magic: Given their extraordinary powers, golems are often described as magical. However, the Created do not appear to be magical creations in the sense that enchanted weapons, caryatid columns, or such are magical. The nature of such items and “created” creatures is readily monitored when a wizard uses a *detect magic* spell. Most golems are not detectable by such a spell. I have only heard of one or two cases in which a golem was successfully spotted in this manner, and even then I am unsure as to whether the “golems” in these instances were true members of the Created. In any event, the wise hunter will not count on such devices to ferret out his quarry.

Unlike ordinary golems created by mages and priests through the use of spells and manuals, the golems born of obsession in Ravenloft are *not* detectable by the *detect magic* spell.

Dispel Magic: Although this spell works admirably with some few golems, in general it has no effect. The only golems who are

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"stunned" by this spell are the relatively stupid automatons created by mages and priests. However, such creatures are not the proper subject of this work.

Energy Drain: Be warned! It is inadvisable to use this powerful spell upon any of the Created. Instead of draining the golem's energies, the spell seems to only heighten its strength. One sage I consulted has suggested that a golem's animating force originates from the same vast reserve of negative energy into which this spell taps. In essence, the spell renews or even increases the golem's power!

If energy drain is cast on a golem, the creature gains 1 Hit Die permanently as a result of the direct contact with the Negative Material Plane.

ESP: This spell does not seem to work on golems. Additionally, I have seen mages faint with horror when making the attempt to contact such an alien and evil mind as that of the Created.

A wizard who attempts to use ESP on a golem must immediately make a horror check due to the incomprehensibly evil and frightening thought patterns. In any case, the caster will never receive useful information from the contact.

Irritation: This spell has no effect on golems.



Move Earth: If my research is reliable, this spell harms most clay golems. Other golems are unaffected.

Move earth inflicts 4d10 points of damage upon a clay golem. A successful saving throw halves damage.

Polymorph Other: To my knowledge, no wizard has ever successfully used this spell against a member of the Created. Even flesh golems are immune; it appears they lack the necessary qualities of the normal, living beings which are susceptible.

Protection from Evil: This spell does seem to offer some protection against the Created. However, as they are not summoned creatures, it does not keep them at bay.

When attacking a character who enjoys such magical protection from evil, golems suffer a -2 attack roll penalty. Further, the protected character receives a +2 to all saving throws against the golem's attacks. However, once the character attacks the golem, the protection is lost.

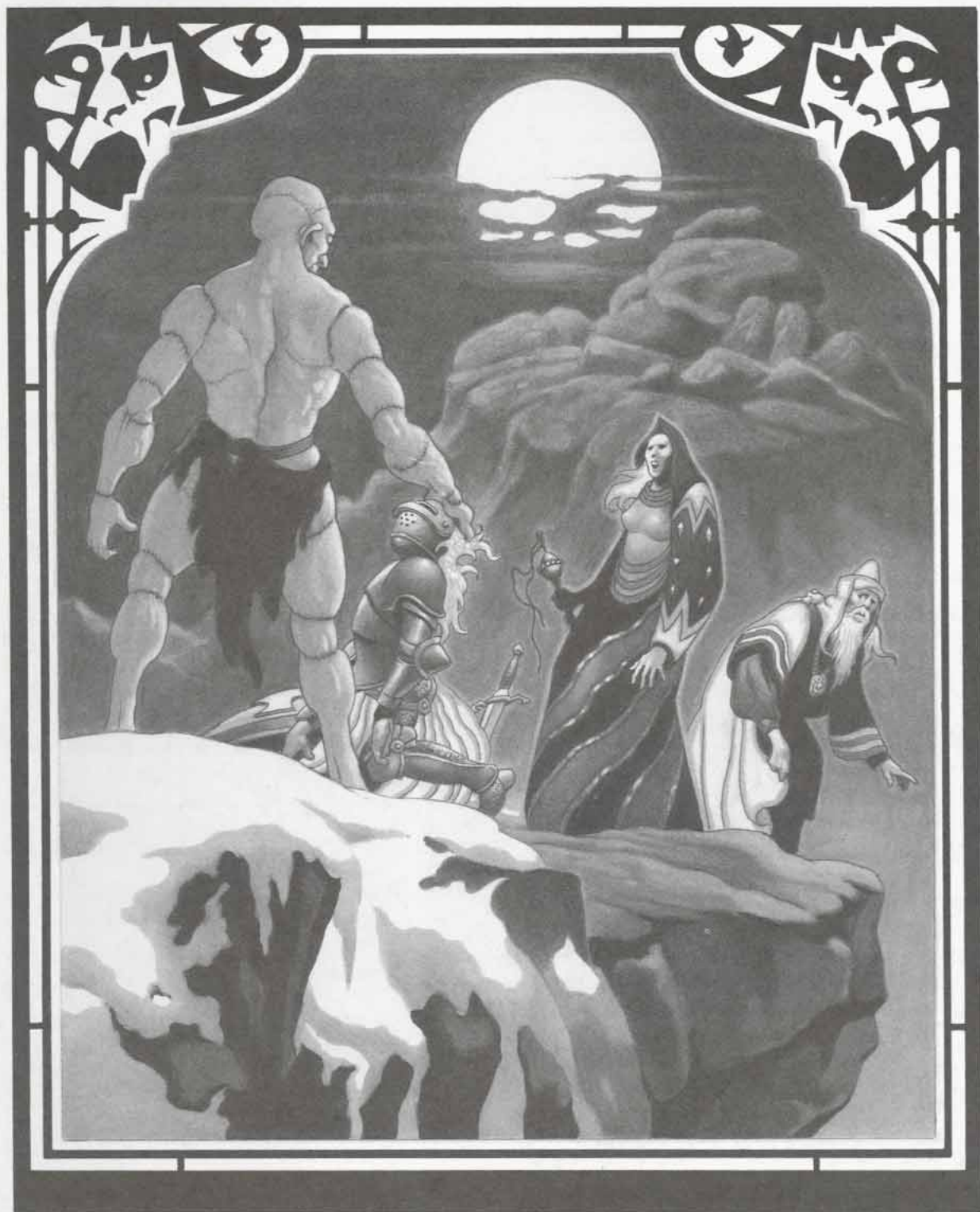
Protection from Evil, 10-Foot Radius: This spell functions under the same restrictions as its counterpart (see above).

Reincarnation: Unfortunately, the spirit within the golem is too twisted and warped, or perhaps simply too trapped, to be removed from the golem body by this spell's force.

Stinking Cloud: This spell does not affect the Created.

Stone to Flesh: This spell can turn a stone golem into a flesh golem. The spell's reverse can transform a flesh golem into one of stone.

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A stone golem is allowed a saving throw against the *stone to flesh* spell and its reverse. Failure indicates that golem has been transformed.

Trap the Soul: This spell does not seem to work against the Created. Either the golem simply does not have a soul to trap, or the soul is too strongly attached to its golem body to be removed by this spell.

Priest Spells

As I have mentioned in previous works, I have at times desired to become a priest. It seems that in the latter years of my life, this calling has grown stronger. Unfortunately, I don't believe I'll ever be able to answer it, for it seems my duties lie in other areas.

The information below relates to a narrower spectrum of spells, but I believe it to be of

even more value than the details regarding wizard spells. I also feel more assured that this information can be relied upon due to the outstanding integrity, dedication, and faith of the good friends and colleagues who compiled it. Without folks such as these, and without their example of exquisite faith and service, I might not have been able to carry on my life's work over all these many years. All those who battle the golem owe them a debt of gratitude.

Animate Rock: This spell can have an interesting and useful effect against stone golems. It seems to cause a tremendous struggle for control between the golem and the priest. Although none of the priests I have talked to has ever seen a priest actually gain control of the golem, they claim the struggle causes the golem to attack less efficiently for the duration of the spell.

If a stone golem fails its saving throw against *animate rock*, the casting priest gains partial control of the golem's body. When this occurs, the stone golem suffers a -4 penalty on all actions, including attacks, for the duration of the spell. The priest must maintain concentration on the spell, taking no other actions; else all spell effects are lost.

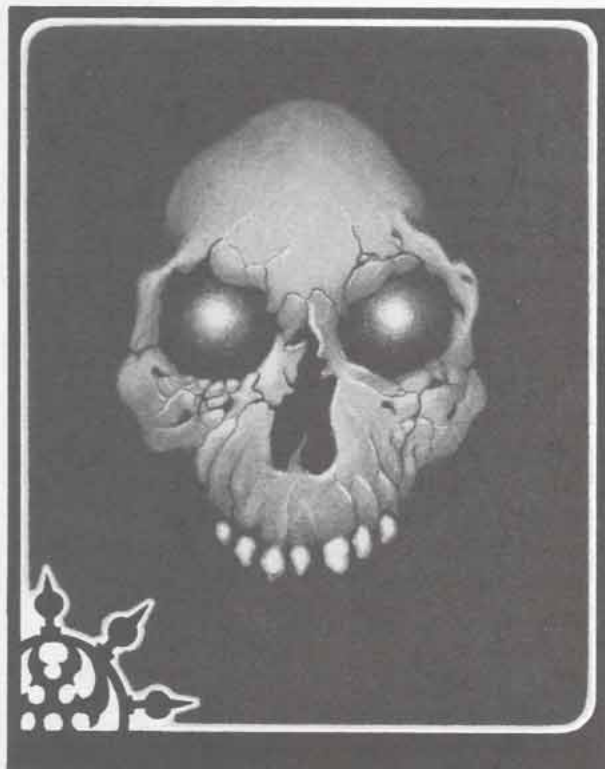
Earthquake: When a stone golem is at hand, this spell is extremely useful. Apparently, this magic makes such a creature shake so violently it causes damage to its form.

When targeted against a stone golem, the *earthquake* spell causes 5d12 points of damage. A successful saving throw cuts the damage in half.

Poison: This spell does not affect the Created.



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Raise Dead: No golem—flesh or otherwise—is affected by this spell. In the case of the flesh golem, I would hazard to guess at two reasons for this utter failure. First, many bodies are used in the creation. Secondly, flesh golems are not truly dead (nor are they truly alive).

Regeneration: Against a flesh golem, this magic is extremely effective. The spell destabilizes the physical integrity of such a creature, eventually causing its death. However, there are two difficulties with the use of this spell. First, although the flesh golem is technically dead, it can still be reanimated at any time. This is rather inconsequential when compared to the second difficulty: the slowness of the spell effect. It takes several minutes for the *regeneration* spell to truly harm the golem. However, as soon as the spell is cast, it seems to cause the already vicious creature to exhibit a truly maniacal burst of violence which lasts as long as the spell's harmful effects.

One final note: If the priest who cast the *regeneration* spell is killed before the golem dies, the spell appears to cause no more harm to the creature. Further, the creature will begin repairing itself at once.

When *regeneration* is cast on a flesh golem, the spell causes no damage for 5 rounds. For each round thereafter, the creature loses 5 hit points. The golem becomes violent and combative for 3d4 rounds after this spell is cast—standing in battle *even* if it has fewer than 0 hit points. During this period, it receives a +2 bonus to all attack rolls.

When the golem at last collapses, it can only be revived through use of its hyper-regeneration ability (if available) or through a reanimating jolt of energy. If the priest who cast the *regeneration* spell is killed before the golem “dies,” the spell ceases to have an effect on the golem.

Resurrection: Like *raise dead*, this spell has no effect on the Created.

Rock to Mud: This spell can be effective against stone golems, turning pieces of the creatures to mud. The reverse, *mud to rock*, affects clay golems in a similar manner.

Rock to mud causes 3d10 points of damage to stone golems. The reverse does the same amount of damage to clay golems.

Trip: Although this spell is considered an enchantment or charm, it is useful against golems, as it affects the object being used instead of the golem itself.

Chapter VI: PSYCHOLOGY



My child, my creation. No longer does she gift me with sweet smiles and flowers. No more does she greet me with pretty words and the music of her laughter. The trinkets that once pleased her so, she now hurls back at me, along with a torrent of foul epithets.

How could my Alyce, she who I labored so hard for, treat me thus? It seems she grows more wicked and willful with every passing day. It is almost as if we are both, she and I, slowly awakening from a beautiful dream where I played the part of the doting father, and she the loving daughter. But what we will find ourselves upon awakening I find too terrible to contemplate.

—From the journal of Thor Hessen

The terror of the unknown is with us from birth. It is part and parcel of being alive. No matter how sophisticated, how strong, or how learned we become, the fear is always there, lurking somewhere in the back of our minds.

When facing a foe as terrifyingly alien as the golem, it is easy to succumb to our age-old fear of the unknown. This fear can cause our own minds and bodies to fail us, just as a weak heart can betray the strongest of warriors. How can we best overcome the mind-numbing terror and knee-weakening horror that is one of the golem's most insidious advantages? Knowledge, pure and simple.

One of the many reasons golems are so horrifying to most of us is simply that we have no psychological context in which to place them or their actions. When facing a mortal foe, we believe we have an understanding of his motives. Many desires and drives are universal to all peoples. The desire to live, to love, to raise families are wishes with which we can identify.

But the Created do not share our mortality. Nor do they share our life cycle. Theirs is a world alien

to our own, with seemingly little in common.

Attaining some understanding of the psychology of the Created serves a dual purpose. In the first place, it gives those who choose to hunt these creatures a better understanding of their foe. This knowledge can provide a crucial, even life-saving advantage to the golem hunter.

The second reason this knowledge is so valuable is far more primal: The more we know about the "bogeyman," the less power our own fear has over us.

Of course, the Created are no mere shadows under the bed. The truth may at first be more horrifying than the vague fears of ignorance. But the truth is far more likely to provide the light needed to find one's way to victory. Ignorance in those who would hunt the Created simply ends in letters of sympathy to their bereaved relatives.

Mental Development of the Golem

To examine the psychology of the Created, we must begin by discussing their mental development. (Of course, I exclude from this discussion any creature that might be described as a mindless automaton, for such golems are not the focus of this work.) As mortals, we grow and develop over the course of many years. Beginning as helpless infants whose only thought is our own comfort, we gradually mature both physically and mentally.

Golems apparently undergo a maturation process as well. However, this process is solely psychological in nature, since the golem begins its existence in a grotesque body that is fully developed. Further, the golem's maturation takes place much more rapidly than our own mental and emotional growth. While our passage from child to adult spans decades, the golem's entire cycle of maturation can take place in a period ranging from as little as several weeks to no more than a year.

In order to better understand the golem's mental development, I have utilized the research

of Dr. Wilhelm Kohl, a brilliant university teacher specializing in the workings of the mind. In his fascinating treatise, *Foundations of Morality*, Dr. Kohl outlined a system of five stages to categorize the moral development of humans.

I have taken the liberty of reworking Dr. Kohl's development theory to apply it to golems. I hope the good doctor will forgive my twisting of his concepts, but I believe this to be the best way to undertake an examination of the maturation process of the Created. The five stages below are given in order, beginning with the golem's initial, immature mental state and ending with the mentally mature golem. Each stage is illustrated by a passage from a diary I have in my possession, which neatly describes a golem's psychological advancement.

While reading this section, keep in mind that the stages presented are mere tools for developing a rudimentary understanding of the golem's mental maturation. The discussion is general in nature, and there is surely a wide degree of variation in the development of individual creatures.

Allow me to add one further note: What is considered development for the golem would most certainly be seen as mental disorder in a person. In no way are the stages given below meant to reflect normal human development.

Stage One: Dependence

Our first days together have been everything I knew they would be. Alyce worships me, and today, for the very first time, she called me Father. Oh, I have so much to teach her! She is a tabula rasa, a blank tablet on which I can bestow all my vast knowledge and learning. I am certain she will appreciate me as those imbeciles at the University could never do.

At the beginning of its existence, a golem is childlike in its dependence upon the creator. The shock of fusing with the golem body has not worn off, and the golem's mind has not yet recovered from this experience.

If the golem's life essence was drawn from a living being, the golem may well experience nightmares. These nightmares are most probably warped memories of its former life.

In any case, the golem will also find it has an uncanny ability to sense what is important to its creator. This ability seems to be the first sign of the near-telepathic bond between the pair (see Chapter III for further details). Why the golem has this bond is unknown, but with few exceptions it holds true.

The golem may well feel the need to be in constant proximity to its creator, its protector at this stage of development. Furthermore, the clumsiness of its new body may add to this feeling of need.

For at least the first several weeks of its existence, the golem must learn to properly use its powerful physical form. This may cause some difficulties for the monster's creator. Imagine a two-year-old human child suddenly thrust into the body of an ogre, and the inherent dangers become obvious.

The golem's view of its creator helps temper these dangers. New to the world and its plight, the golem probably sees its creator as an omnipotent, godlike being who is utterly responsible for the golem's life and well-being.

Is it possible for any creature, any living being, to be inherently evil? Such an assertion may itself facilitate the committing of evil acts. By viewing any person as inherently evil, we take away his ability to be anything else. All actions are seen as being motivated by the individual's evil. Even acts of kindness are questioned, and assumed to have ulterior motives. Thus the person is never rewarded for behaving properly. Similarly, by defining a person as evil we also give that person free rein to behave as he will. After all, he is not responsible for his evil nature and thus he feels no compunction to behave properly.

—Ansolm Haas, *The Isolation of Evil*



To the newly created monster, the “parent” may be perfection, utterly infallible. The creator will be obeyed out of a mixture of fear and respect, and the golem typically craves the attention and approval of its master.

This stage of relative innocence and obedience can last anywhere from a few days to more than a month. However, should the creature confront a person other than the creator—and discover the horror and disgust with which a sane person inevitably views the golem—then the creature may quickly enter the second phase of development: confusion.

Stage Two: Confusion

Yesterday Alyce was exploring the lower parlor, where she apparently disturbed the maid. The woman reacted poorly, shrieking and causing a scene. Since that time, Alyce has seemed almost pensive. I believe I shall remove the mirrors from this wing of the manor. The looking glasses seem somehow to upset my dear Alyce.

Within a relatively short period, the golem must begin to realize its repulsiveness to other beings. The golem looks into a mirror, or sees the horror with which all but perhaps its creator gaze upon it. Recognizing that it is somehow a different kind of creature than its parent, the golem may well grow confused. Ironically, by this time the initial shock caused by binding the spirit to the golem’s body has certainly faded, and so too has the resulting disorientation. The creature’s intelligence can be measured as average—high enough to understand its pitiful position within the society around it.

Think on how a foundling child often feels when he first discovers he is different from other family members. It is an isolating experience, although it is also one from which a healthy child soon recovers. But the golem does not share the healthy mind of a mortal child. Furthermore, the golem’s isolation is much greater than the foundling’s. The creature’s own evil nature sets it apart. Soon the combination of

its powerful body, feelings of isolation and confusion, and its inherent nature goad the golem into questioning the omnipotence of its creator. The golem may even attempt to get its parent to change its body into a more "pleasing" form, one similar to the creator's.

In any event, it is at this stage the golem first begins to turn away from its creator. At some point, the creator will be unable to meet one of his creation's demands, or the golem will be rejected in its attempts at friendship with others. Then the golem's first feelings of betrayal begin to emerge, and it is on its way to the third phase of development.

The second stage represents the last period of "innocence" for the golem, if it is even possible for us to speak of an innocent golem. Beyond this, the inherent evil of the creature begins to truly manifest. The length of this stage varies greatly, but it is likely to be anywhere from one week to two months in duration.

Stage Three: Betrayal

Today I found the dogs—all five of my loyal wolfhounds. She left them by the grand fireplace where they so often warmed themselves after the hunt. But today their bodies were as cold as the ashes from last winter's fires. Alyce is growing more vehement in her outbursts, with unacceptable results. I shall have to have a long talk with her.

Now the true evil of the golem begins to surface. The creature senses its own perversity, and realizes how alone it truly is among mortals. The golem's creator—and thus the entire world—has betrayed it.

The creature suffers a fundamental lacking: It has no sense of continuity and connection to the rest of the world. The only person at all capable of understanding the fledgling golem is its creator, the golem's erstwhile parent. However, in my opinion, any person capable of constructing a golem is himself lacking in some fundamental manner. Furthermore, even

if that parent still views the golem favorably, by this time the parent has inevitably failed the golem. And the golem, feeling it has little control over its own life and environment, begins to rebel.

This process may sound very similar to the distancing an adolescent normally undergoes in relation to his family. The crucial distinction here is that the teenager moves further from his parents in an effort to gain acceptance in society as a whole. In contrast, the golem rejects his only source of companionship and moves only toward an even greater isolation.

The feelings of betrayal caused by the golem's isolation may be compounded by the creature's developing intelligence and intimate knowledge of its creator. As the telepathic bond between a golem and its creator strengthens, the golem begins to sense its maker's selfish motives. Consciously or subconsciously, the golem comes to realize that its welfare is not the creator's sole concern, and that it has been sentenced to an existence of monstrous isolation and rejection by all living beings.

As the creature examines the differences between itself and mortals, it discovers its great strength and abilities. It tests those abilities more and more. The creature comes to realize that it boasts the physical capacity to do almost whatever it wishes. The only thing standing in its way is its creator: the parent who refuses to let the golem have its way in all things.

Soon the golem releases its frustrations in various forms of destruction, from mayhem to murder. Through that destruction, the golem at last begins to realize its *true* power. At some point its creator will be forced to confront his creation. He may well find himself inadequate to the task. After all, he has created a being far more powerful than himself.

This stage normally lasts but a few days. The golem will escalate its evil acts until it forces its creator into a confrontation of some sort. Once this confrontation occurs, the next stage in the golem's mental development is inevitable.

Stage Four: Contempt

It seems I grow wearier with every passing hour. Even as I write this passage, I can hear her dainty footsteps in the hall outside my room. Soon she will begin singing that song again. Ah, yes! It begins again:

Father, father, come out to play,
Father, father, come out I pray.
Father, father, do not cry,
Your dear Alyce cannot die.

How much longer I can tolerate her taunting I do not know. But I must not stand for this. She was made to be my sweet daughter, and daughters do as their fathers command!

When the golem provokes its creator into a confrontation, it discovers the relative impotence of its parent. The parent can threaten, but he has lost all true control over the golem. Once this realization sets in, the golem becomes utterly contemptuous of the weakling who masqueraded as its master. Within the golem's mind a synthesis occurs: The creature's sense of power combines with the awareness that it may live forever in a world that rejects it utterly, creating a scorn that burns more intensely than any natural flame.

The intellect of the golem is now fully developed, and it includes a penchant for manipulation as well as a facile cunning. The one-way telepathic bond the golem has with its creator now lends the creature an extraordinary understanding of that person. In the golem's own twisted way, it fully comprehends the pathetic weaknesses, selfish obsession, and madness that make up its creator's psyche.

All people, even the noblest of us, have private thoughts and feelings not fit for revelation to others. Most of us attempt to moderate and conceal these unsavory aspects of ourselves. We also keep within our hearts cherished needs, loves, and desires that we may not even share with our closest intimates.

The golem has access to the deepest recesses of its creator's heart, mind, and soul. This total

knowledge inevitably breeds contempt. It also allows the golem to use its evil cunning to torment its creator. The creature cannot help but know what actions hurt its creator most. Soon it is not enough to simply deride the creator—the golem feels the need to flaunt its superiority to any who might fail to see the chasm separating the pathetic parent and his powerful child.

I have observed enormous differences between individual golems at this stage of development. However, all golems must surely grow to feel contempt for their creator. The more the creator attempts to control his creation, the sooner the final stage in the golem's development will commence—the stage in which the golem's contempt gives way to hatred and the creator's days become numbered. After that, it is simply a matter of time.

Stage Five: Hatred

I will go to her and make her understand. She is my daughter and must obey. If she refuses yet again, I will be forced to cast her out and begin the process of creation a second time.

After all my long months of labor, to be betrayed by such an ungrateful wretch—it is unthinkable! I made her; if not for me she would be nothing but moldering flesh. She owes me both her obedience and her gratitude, and I shall have both in full measure. She shall give me what I have earned!

—Final journal entry of Thor Hessen

In this final stage, the golem's contempt for its creator deepens, becoming a dark, malevolent hatred. The creator must come face to face with the consequences of his own evil, embodied in the fury of his creation.

Just as contempt gives way to hatred, the golem's need to flaunt its superiority gives way to a desire to destroy the creator. The creature seeks to murder its parent, thereby severing its last tie to the living. This murder may not take place immediately, however. While most golems do attempt to dispatch with their creators

posthaste, I have known of a few creatures who purposefully delayed the act. These golems took their time in planning or attempting the deed, apparently for the sheer enjoyment of tormenting their creators. Thus, even if a golem does not immediately succeed at patricide, the creator will always be in danger.

The creator is at a distinct disadvantage in such a contest. The golem is powerful foe against any mortal, but the creator is especially vulnerable. As noted earlier, the golem boasts an extraordinary bond to the creator's mind—a bond which enables it to know the creator better than the creator knows himself. Armed with such intimate knowledge, the golem may anticipate every action and reaction of its creator as it plots to destroy the puny, insignificant wretch who once dared to use and control it.

Summation

The information above details the mental development and separation process the golem experiences over the course of its "childhood." However, it does not address the actual psychology of the golem—its individual perceptions and feelings about itself and its new world. I shall address those issues in the following section.

Psychology of the Created

P sychology is an inexact science at best. Even the most learned mages and scholars do not truly understand the inner workings of a sane man's mind, much less the twisted psyche of a golem. This is not to say that a knowledge of psychology is worthless. Quite the contrary. Just as we would not throw away an entire loaf of bread simply because a few bites were missing, so we should not dismiss the advantage that a knowledge of our enemy's thought processes can give us simply because that knowledge is incomplete.



Since we know so little about our own minds, readers may assume we must know almost nothing about the Created. That is not necessarily true. The mind of a golem seems much less complex than that of the Born. Perhaps the enormous shock the Created undergo upon their "birth" is the source of this relative simplicity. Of course, I do not wish to imply that these creatures are stupid, or that one golem's mind is the same as the next's. However, the creatures do appear limited in the scope of their thought processes. This may explain why many golems tend to fixate on a single driving obsession.

With these comments in mind, let us now turn to a brief study of the psychology of the golem. Much of the information I am about to share is derived from an exchange of letters between me and Doctor Cassien Attenberg, a noted specialist in nonhuman psychology, as well as an esteemed colleague and friend. I have included key excerpts from Doctor Attenberg's letters to help illustrate each point.

Views on the Self

... As to your inquiry on the matter of the Created and their concept of the Self: The answer must surely be that they do have this conception. However, the conception of Self possessed by a golem must be a terrible one, for it seems to me the golem is similar to a feral child—raised to maturity without benefit of an appropriate figure with which to identify (i.e., a parental golem). Thus its self concept derives from its own experiences and the warping influence of its creator. ...

—Cassien Attenberg

Many theorists maintain that one of the basic requirements for true sentience is that the creature or being in question has an awareness of the Self. By this we mean that the being must be aware of its identity as an individual—be self-aware as it were—in order to be considered truly sentient.

Through the evidence I and others have collected over the years, both first- and second-hand, it does indeed appear that the Created qualify as sentient beings. Although their consciousness is quite alien to our own, there is no question but that a golem is truly aware of its own existence as a separate being. And if a golem is indeed self-aware, then how does the creature view itself? That is the question I shall next address. However, before focusing on the Created in particular, I believe it would be helpful to briefly discuss a particular phenomenon occasionally found in human children.

Normal mortal children experience a series of stages in which they slowly develop their own sense of separate identity. If raised in a warm and loving home, a child will grow to appreciate his own worth. Such a child will, in all probability, grow up to become a productive member of his community.

However, a child who is raised in an abusive environment—and unfortunately I have seen far too many such cases—often fails to develop a sense of his own self-worth and acceptability. Such children often wind up spending their adult lives as criminals, hermits, or as other sundry social misfits.

But what of the children raised in loving homes—wanting for nothing, given education both moral and intellectual—who commit evil, despicable acts despite all the advantages a healthy environment can offer? Parents of such children often despair at their own, personal failings, wondering what they did to cause their child to behave so cruelly. When questioned, it often comes to light that the child began to behave in a selfish, cruel manner at a very early age. Such children are often labeled "bad seeds." It is perhaps an unfortunate label, and only applies to the smallest fraction of children, but in such cases it appears that the child is born with the ability to form a sense of self, but without the capability to truly care about and form attachments to others.

I mention such children for one simple reason. The Created may be the ultimate “bad seeds,” incapable of identifying with others and thus incapable of true morality. Initially, golems appear to be simply curious about themselves. Like small children, they experiment and revel in new-found abilities and talents.

However, as a golem grows to realize its true nature and how it came to *be*, the golem often begins to view itself with ever greater self-loathing. The creature realizes it can never be truly accepted by the born and can never partake of the cycle of life (for, as I have mentioned, golems are infertile). It grows to understand how horrifying others find it, and how mortals look upon its cobbled-together body with revulsion and disgust.

Many factors in combination, certainly not limited to the ideation above, cause the golem's opinion of itself to shift. Where it initially viewed itself with mere curiosity, the golem becomes a creature filled with self-loathing. Perhaps this seeming incapacity for self-acceptance and love is at the base of the golem's evil. Perhaps when a spirit is forced into the waiting vessel—the golem body—any ability to truly love and care is lost in the process. Whatever the ultimate reasons, suffice it to say that the golem views itself with hatred.

Views on the Creator

... but how terrible it must be to always look into the mind of one's "parent." All parents occasionally think ill of their children, but good parents give only constructive criticism to their young. Children need to feel secure in that they are loved and deserving of love. It is inherently impossible for a golem to feel this way. Even worse, the mind with which the golem is in constant contact from the moment of its genesis is twisted and harmful. Children who are raised by abusive and mean-spirited parents so often grow up to be the same. Think on what such intimate contact must do to the golem's mind!

—Cassien Attenberg

As discussed earlier, a golem's view toward its creator changes dramatically as it matures. When new to the world, the golem views its creator as an omnipotent parental figure, a virtual god. As the golem becomes more self-aware, however, its opinion of its creator degenerates. In the end, the golem views its creator as the author of its misery and loneliness. Hatred and contempt replace the feelings of awe and respect.

I have already asserted that this progression stems in part from the unique, one-way telepathy binding the golem to its creator. It seems that the golem is in near-constant contact with the creator's thoughts and feelings. The creator of a golem is an insane individual, obsessed and evil. Thus, it is my firm belief that this link contributes greatly to the golem's own warped psychology.

Some sages do not agree that all golem creators are evil madmen, noting that noble priests might also fashion a golem. I say there is nothing noble at all in such a pursuit. True, a kindly cleric may fashion a mindless automaton, and do so with the best of intentions. I condemn the act nonetheless. As I warned at the onset of this work, those who create life in this heinous fashion are toying with dark and deadly powers, and they will sacrifice their own humanity as a result.

Obviously, the golem cannot help but be affected by its constant, intimate contact with such depravity. Every time the golem fails its parent, it most assuredly feels the rejection of its creator. The fact that such rejection may not be outwardly expressed makes it no less acute. The creature, in turn, lashes out against the one who caused it pain, once more earning the disapproval of its parent.

I am certain this vicious cycle is a central factor contributing to both the golem's self-hatred and its loathing for its creator. So closely entwined are these emotions that it is almost impossible to intelligently discuss a golem's feelings for itself or for its creator as separate topics.



Views on Mankind

The golem appears to understand that other beings have a concrete existence—that we are not merely shadows and smoke, but thinking and feeling creatures. Still, the Created may be termed a sociopathic race, for when a golem decides on a given course of action, it considers only the action's effects on itself. No other factors—such as the consequences to others—are considered valid. What is right is whatever the golem finds pleasing.

—Cassien Attenberg

Among the most evil aspects of the golem is its complete lack of empathy for living creatures. It views all other creatures as objects. In part, this is because the golem is incapable of feeling true pain, or at least it does not experience pain as we do. The golem's only experience of physical anguish is gained vicariously through its telepathic link to its creator, and even then there

is no evidence the golem actually *feels* its creator's pain. Having no understanding of pain, the golem is unlikely to feel any qualms about inflicting it.

In a similar vein, the golem may not be able to truly comprehend death. To the golem, a life has no more value than a wind-up toy. We do not feel a toy has "died" simply because it stops working. If this occurs, we merely go out to purchase another toy.

I have encountered a few golems who appeared to form an attachment to a particular mortal, who even professed to love that person. But it is safe to say that such a golem cannot comprehend the true meaning of this emotion, much less experience it. Instead, the golem feels something more akin to obsession—a selfish, blinding desire not unlike the emotion festering inside its creator.

Views on Other Golems

In examining the relationship golems have with another, I have often observed the psychological phenomenon known as *transference*. When this occurs in humans and demihumans, feelings about oneself and one's actions are externalized and are then ascribed to someone else. For example, an individual who feels that he is lazy may transfer this feeling onto, say, his son and accuse the son of being shiftless and lazy. Such individuals find it easier to take out their feelings on others than to confront their own feelings of inadequacy.

As stated earlier, golems grow to hate themselves. Such self-loathing could easily transfer onto any other golems encountered. Of course, this would not cause the golem to like itself any better, but it would provide another—perhaps fatal—target or outlet for its hatred and violence.

The golem is, in essence, a creature of isolation. It is cut off from the natural processes, removed from the cycle of life and death to which most creatures belong. As such, it does not necessarily feel the same need for others of

its kind that we, as social creatures, feel. Biologically speaking, there is no reason for one golem to interact with another member of the Created. Such interaction never leads to procreation and the furtherance of golems "as a species," so to speak.

However, we must remember that golems are individuals, and it is dangerous to paint them in strokes which are too broad. Simply because there is no valid biological reason for golems to interact with one another does not mean they have no desire to do so. Some golems loathe their ultimate isolation and the constant, violent rejections of others with whom they come in contact. It is certainly reasonable to believe other golems would be more accepting of the hideous visage and terrifying powers of the Created, as they themselves almost surely possess the same.

The following transcription lends support to this theory. The text, which describes the experience of a chimney sweep in Lamordia, was sent to me by a priest of impeccable repute. At the time of this writing, I have no confirmation that this evidence is valid. However, the priest vouches for the witness's sterling reputation. Furthermore, the priest has also related persistent rumors and stories about Lamordia's "devil man"—stories that seem relatively consistent with the fellow's account below, or at least with the existence of one or more flesh golems in the area.

I were in the chimney when it all happened. Now, I know that might sound sort of crazy, bein' in the chimney, but it weren't. I'm a chimney sweep by trade, so I spend lots of time in lots of chimneys. I'm a good sweep, too—ask anyone. Never had a single complaint.

Course'n the poor fellow whose chimney I was in when it happened has got a right to 'is complaint, which I'm sure he'd make if'n he could. After all, I didn't help him none. I feel real bad about that, but it just didn't seem like there was much I could do, so's why get myself nicked too? Truth be it, I was too scared to move

anyways. Just kept hopin' I wouldn't sneeze. Garson's chimney was a real sight of a mess, it was! Course, now so's Garson, poor sod.

Anyway, I was up in the chimney, but there was this piece of a brick missing, so's I could peak into the room if I put my eye to the hole. I was just pokin' on that broken brick to see if the whole thing weren't loose when Garson got a knock on his door. He was just getting around to it when I heard this splinterin' thud of a sound. It was like the sound of splitting a thin slice o' hardwood.

Well, Garson was up like a rabbit and I could just make out this look on his face, worse'n if it was the tax collector or somethin'. Then these arms . . . these arms just reached out and grabbed his neck. I couldn't make out the killer too well on account of he was wearing this dark, hooded cloak, but his arms and hands. . . . Well, they was in worse shape than any blacksmith's I've ever seen. It was like you took some body parts and stitched 'em together—only they worked!

The whole thing must of only taken a second. Then Garson's neck snapped and I knew he was dead. And then I saw the other two. They all three wore the same type of hooded cloak. One of 'em had a good-sized bundle in his arms, and I suppose now that must have been Garson's wife, since she's missing too. Anyway, just as these three was leavin', I caught a glimpse of the first one's face. I ain't afraid to say I fainted right then and there—but lucky for me I got stuck in the chimney when I slumped down. Anyhow, that first one's face was all pieced together and weird. It's probably a good thing I did faint, else I think I would've screamed me head off. Would've been the end of me too, then. . . .

The witness goes on for a while longer, but the most likely assumption here is that the individuals in question were flesh golems working together. It certainly brings up the possibility that there might be a small group of golems living and working as a team in

Creator and Created

A golem and its creator are uniquely linked by their bizarre parent-child relationship. Any person who creates a golem is, by nature, a twisted and obsessed individual. The obsessions that drive the creator to make his golem do not disappear upon the monster's animation. In fact, the creator usually slips further into madness and evil after his "success."

Due to the powerful and complex connection between creator and creation, a DM may wish to consider not only the golem, but the golem's maker when designing adventures. In fact, discovering the creator of a golem and attempting to discover the nature of the creator's obsessions, as well as his construction methods, can be an adventure in and of itself. Such creators can themselves be dangerous foes, often extremely protective of their evil progeny, as well as their dread knowledge. Adventures of this kind can range from destroying a creator's laboratory to spying on the deranged creator in order to gain information on the golem and its particular strengths and weaknesses.

The best and most memorable villains are not mindless, snarling beasts. Adding history, goals, and personality to your monsters (human and otherwise) will create far more interesting foes to challenge your players.

Lamordia. If so, they might have formed the rudiments of a society.

It would not be illogical to suppose that a few flesh golems have formed some sort of family unit and are attempting to find a means of propagating their species. We can only pray that such is not the case, or at least that it is ultimately impossible for one golem to create another. Even a small army of golems could obliterate whole cities with little effort.

One final note on the story above: The chimney sweep in question apparently

disappeared himself less than a week after giving his testimony to the priest. It is unfortunate, as I would have liked to personally question the man. At least his story went on record. I wonder how many such stories have gone untold?

Goals of the Created

No creature can go through life without goals. Even the ant and the toad have goals, however simple they may seem to you and me. But to the ant digging its tunnel, or the swallow feeding her hatchlings, our goals are as irrelevant to them as theirs are to us. What is important, what is precious, is all simply a matter of perspective.

—Cassien Attenberg

Humans and demihumans, like all creatures, can be seen as having a number of different goals, some more important than others. First and foremost we need sustenance, shelter, and other basic necessities of life. Once these basic needs are met, we can concentrate on our more individualistic or esoteric concerns.

The Created do share the basic needs for shelter and sustenance confronting the Born. Thus, a golem faces an existence in which goals can be seized almost at random. Yet in my experience it is almost invariably true that the golem's main goals and concerns are either similar to their creator's or, even more common, a perversion of such goals. The ultimate twist, of course, is the most deadly: The creator wishes to live, but the golem, in time, wishes to destroy that life. This murder is often the golem's overriding concern so long as its creator survives.

Golems have numerous other concerns, however. As mentioned above, many golems do seem to have a great and unfulfilled wish to be accepted by others. Thus, another common and ultimately unattainable goal is the desire to propagate their species. Beyond this, goals may vary widely between individual golems, and often seem inscrutable to sane mortals.

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Knowledge of a particular golem's specific goals can aid those of us who seek to destroy them. It is at times possible to stage a combat in the time and place of one's own choosing, instead of a situation favoring the golem. This advantage can only be gained through shrewd guesswork and observation, but such groundwork may provide the key to determining what is important to the golem, and thus what might move the creature to come to your chosen place of battle.

Whatever their individual desires may be, it seems that all golems have a tendency to fixate on one particular goal at any given time. Unlike humans and demihumans who constantly strive to achieve numerous goals, the golem focuses its indomitable will on one goal at a time. This single-mindedness is a double-edged sword to the golem's foes. It makes the golem more predictable, but it also makes the creature unyielding, and perhaps even unstoppable.

A Creature Built of Hate?

Although it is extremely tempting to assume that a golem is such a hate-filled creature that it despises everything, caring about nothing save itself, this is perhaps too simple a position.

I do not believe that any creature fueled only by such an emotion can function. It has been suggested by some that, while a golem does not hate everything, it at best feels apathy toward a being or subject. This too seems inadequate. Both of the above opinions suggest we may be incapable of understanding what such a creature as a golem cares about. Their concerns are surely different from our own.

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to put forth possible concerns and needs of the Created. What the psychology of the golem may most nearly mirror is the psychology of the sociopath who suffered trauma or abuse as a child. Although I feel sympathy for such an injured youth, I cannot feel the same for an

adult who expresses his needs through violence and pain, placing his concerns above all others. The golem may well be such a creature, abused by its "parent," shunned by society. The golem may well wish for acceptance, may even yearn to please. So, in some manner I grieve for this creature brought into our world only to know hate rather than love. But this does not excuse or lessen the golem's evil actions and its basic inability to truly care about others.

The Golem as NPC

Golems are unquestionably powerful villains. However, in any role-playing game, an NPC is not brought to life by a simple set of statistics or nifty abilities. This is particularly true in the gothic horror setting of Ravenloft.

Golems are creatures of nightmare, and to fully utilize these monsters the DM must create an NPC the players feel is both unpredictable and dangerous.

When role-playing the golem NPC, the DM should try to convey to the players the relentless *intensity* of the creature. For example, you might answer the PC's actions by repeating the same description again and again ("It just keeps coming toward you. . ."). This sort of repetition, if used in an appropriate situation (such as when the party is trying to flee from the golem), can add greatly to the drama. Another unnerving tactic is to have your golem maintain a particular expression no matter what. You might stare impassively for periods of time. Or smile. It is amazing how unnerved players can become when faced with a continually smiling foe—especially when they are doing their best to kill the thing!

Whatever your particular golem's goals, never allow anyone or anything to deter it from its particular task (unless it is killed, of course).

Chapter VIII: PURSUIT



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omeone once asked me why I risk my life in service to others. The question struck me as odd, which in itself perhaps best serves as the answer to the question.

—The musings of Astonby of the Oaks as recorded by Taynesbert in *The Open Palm*

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.

—Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

The latter part of my life has been devoted to the hunting of evil. At first, my mission was simple;

I wished only to destroy Baron Metus, the vampire who had murdered my dear wife and son. But once my eyes had been opened to the horrors lurking in the shadows of this land, my resolve to combat the forces of evil grew stronger. Occasionally, I find myself questioning the vocation which fate has thrust upon me—especially when I am alone in the wild, wrapped in little more than the damp night air, huddled beside my horse for warmth. But such moments, however filled with doubt or self-pity, have never swayed my course. For myself, I can only agree with the sentiments of Astonby of the Oaks and echo his words: “How could I do otherwise, having been given the knowledge, abilities, and commitment to do good?”

I do not mean to imply that such doubt-filled musings are of no consequence. When a person commits to a course of action involving the death of another being—no matter how foul and evil that creature may seem—then he or she must strongly question the motives. If, upon introspection, this individual discovers expectations of glory, wealth, or similar gains, then he or she would do well to put aside all notions of becoming a hunter. In the first place,

such personal rewards are seldom found. It is far more likely that loneliness, struggle, and anonymity will be the wages of this work. Secondly, and most importantly, when our motives turn toward personal gain and away from the welfare of others, we risk becoming the very beast we seek to destroy.

So, good reader, think carefully on your motivations for taking up your sword and stepping into the fray. And if—after such introspection—you truly believe that you take on such dangers to aid our land and its people, then gladly do I welcome your aid!

This chapter is designed as a tool for those who would hunt golems. To successfully face and defeat such a powerful foe, you must proceed carefully and make full use of all your faculties. I shall detail the basic steps in the hunt below. Do not take these steps to heart as unalterable law; each situation differs, and therefore may require improvisation. Still, I would suggest following my method whenever possible, for I’ve found it reduces casualties among golem hunters, and offers at least some chance at succeeding in this heroic task.

Throughout this chapter, I shall illustrate key points by examining a particular expedition I conducted recently. This hunt for the gibbering golem, as the creature was called, was extremely dangerous. It should adequately depict the horrors one faces while stalking one of the Created.

In order for the reader to better grasp the nature of the situation, I will begin by relating the story of the gibbering golem’s creation and the onset of its reign of terror.

The Gibbering Golem

Fressen Woodhall was born into one of the oldest families of Il Aluk, the principal city of Darkon. Once, the Woodhalls enjoyed a considerable fortune. But Fressen’s grandfather had lost much of the family’s resources in some speculative business ventures, in a manner fraught with scandal and shame.

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Fressen's father, Edward, found it difficult to support his family. Too proud to accept any handouts, Edward was away from his family for months at a time as he struggled determinedly to rebuild the lost fortune.

Fressen was a lonely child. He idolized his much absent father, and desperately strove for Edward's praise and affection. The boy often became jealous of the attention Edward paid to Fressen's own mother, Danalie. Upon returning home, Edward brought her small trinkets and talked with her for hours at a time. Edward and Danalie were much in love, and they found their time together all too brief.

As the years passed, Fressen's jealousy grew. Finally, he resented even the smallest amount of time that Edward would devote to Danalie at home. Fressen's parents strove to make him understand that Edward could love and pay attention to both mother and son, just as Danalie could love them both. Unfortunately, this did no good. Fressen soon stopped speaking to his mother altogether whenever Edward was home.

By the time Fressen was ten, his parents feared he had a serious problem—one which he might never outgrow. Nothing they did seemed to ease his jealousy, and Fressen's behavior became violent. Finally, on the night before Edward set out on yet another trip, Edward gave his young son an ultimatum: Be kind to his mother or be sent away.

When Edward returned from his trip, he found the life he had known destroyed. Danalie had died from injuries suffered when she fell down a staircase. Although the death was officially ruled an accident, Edward feared a darker truth. When Edward confronted his son, the boy confirmed his fears: Fressen had pushed Danalie to her death. Horrified and anguished, Edward sent the boy to an asylum for the insane, where he hoped some help might be found.

Although he had read reports of his son's condition at first, Edward lost interest in time. His continued to travel in the pursuit of his business, and eventually all his years of hard work brought financial reward. He took a new

wife. Choosing to leave the terrible memories of his past behind him, Edward finally abandoned his son completely. He sent a letter to the asylum, stating that his son was to be told that Edward was dead.

Despite all the doctors' efforts, Fressen never recovered. He grew up in the asylum, alternating between short fits of violence and long periods of delusion in which he spoke of his father as if the man were omnipotent and perfect in every way.

The only positive interaction the doctors were able to have with Fressen involved his fascination with anatomy, physiology, and psychology. When poring over books on these subjects, Fressen would become quite agreeable and even lively. His intellect was sharp, and as long as he was given new reading material he behaved civilly.

Eventually, Fressen was even allowed to work as an aide to the doctors. He cleaned the medical facilities, including the room in which the bodies of recently deceased patients were stored. One night, while working within that chamber, a particular cadaver commanded his attention. Fressen stared at the face of a corpse on the table before him. The profile was uncanny; the man was the spitting image of his father. Upon examining the corpse, however, Fressen realized that only the shape of the face was satisfactory. The rest was all wrong—even the eyes, which were green instead of blue. Fressen feverishly examined the cadavers around him. He was struck with a brilliant idea: If he took parts from different bodies and placed them together, he could recreate his father's form! Once the body was prepared, surely his father's "spirit" would return to it, and they would be reunited as father and son.

Working frenetically, the deranged young man began to cobble together a body, using surgical tools and the knowledge he had gained from his studies. The hands of the creation posed the greatest challenge; in his effort to recreate exactly a peculiarity in his father's left index finger, Fressen inadvertently exaggerated the size difference between the two hands. When he

was finished, the self-taught surgeon gazed adoringly at his work. His father had indeed returned to him, to live again in the body *he* had prepared. But something was wrong—the figure on the table lay too still. Fressen pondered the problem. He imagined that the shock of the transfer into the new body must have placed his father in a catatonic state. Fressen chose a treatment which he had seen the asylum's doctors use upon other catatonic patients: shock therapy. This, he reasoned, would bring his father back to awareness.

Fressen placed the metal restraints and electrodes on the golem's body. Then he turned the wheel of the apparatus again and again, faster and faster, lending every fiber of his being to the task of generating the required electricity. Finally, a jolt of energy surged into the cadaver. Fressen stood over it, anxiously awaiting a sign. Alas, his "father" refused to stir.

The mad surgeon tried one final, desperate measure. He gave his father an infusion of his own blood. This, he reasoned, would seal the bond of kinship between them, and welcome his father's spirit fully into its new home. As the blood seeped from Fressen into the corpse, the surgeon could feel himself growing dizzy. But his need for his father to be with him once more drove Fressen on, and he called out to his father over and over, urging him to wake.

When the doctors found Fressen, he was barely alive, lying beside the horrible corpse he had sewn together that night. The chief physician locked Fressen in a private cell, and then ordered the hideous creation destroyed. But when the doctors returned to the morgue, the thing was gone.

Confused and alarmed, the doctors instituted a search for the body. Unfortunately for them, they found it. Or rather, it found *them*. The new "Edward" proceeded to kill each and every doctor at the asylum that night. Skittering through the bleak halls by torchlight, hooting and gibbering, the golem returned from its first bloody night of existence to free his "son" and creator, Fressen.

For some few months, Fressen and his golem controlled the asylum. Located perhaps ten miles from the nearest village, the isolated asylum rarely received visitors, and thus no one discovered the doctors' tragic fates.

As the months passed, Fressen's "father" began to challenge and mock the young man. Finally, the golem ignored him. Instead of playing with Fressen, the golem became interested in finding a perfect mate for itself. Once again, as long ago, Fressen felt a rage burning within.

When he confronted the golem and demanded its full attention, Fressen was horrified to discover he no longer had any control over his creation. As Fressen stood before the golem, "Father" began to laugh—creating a gurgling, gibbering sound in which Fressen heard only mockery and hate. Turning to flee from the terrible rejection and that hideous laugh, Fressen found himself unable to escape the sound. Wherever he ran, he heard the terrible laughter and the words of Father's scorn.

Overwhelmed with pain and exhaustion, with his creation's weird, gibbering laughter still echoing within his mind, Fressen collapsed. Slowly, surely, the echoing footsteps and maniacal laughter of his father approached. When his father stood beside him, the laughter quieted. Fressen felt his father pick him up and cradle him in his arms—finally, as his creation was meant to do. Fressen felt he had won his father's unswerving affection at last. Moments later, the boy was hurled down a tower staircase to his death.

The gibbering golem lived on in the asylum, but could find no appropriate mate there. Exploring outside its home, it discovered the nearby village. It was there the golem found his first new "bride." Staring at the woman, the gibbering golem discovered he could feel her feelings, taste her thoughts, exactly as he could Fressen's.

Delighted at the thought of being with his chosen mate, the golem presented himself to the woman, declaring his love for her. But his initial happiness changed to fury as he felt his mate's horrified rejection stabbing into his mind. Enraged, the golem seized the woman as she

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turned to flee. He shook her furiously for minutes on end, gibbering hideously all the while. Finally, his rage abated, and the creature brought the now quiescent body of his bride back to the asylum.

* * *

So begins the tale of the gibbering golem, as I have come to know it. Much of the story, of course, is surmised rather than known. However, one thing is clear: The tale did not end with the golem and his dead bride living happily ever after. Unfortunately, the gibbering golem claimed many a new wife before I and my comrades were able to hunt him down. In the pages to come, I shall share with you a letter I penned to a fellow comrade in the war against evil, describing my encounter with this dreadful creature. This letter illustrates perfectly the many stages of the hunt.

Discovery

Before it is possible to begin your quest to destroy a golem, you must obviously first learn of its existence. However, unlike with many other creatures such as lycanthropes or ghosts, tales of possible golems terrorizing a region tend not to describe the terrifying creature as a golem. It is rare indeed to hear a story using the term *golem* at all, as the vast majority of the populace are not aware such creatures exist, even in myths and legends.

Admittedly, this lessens the number of completely unfounded tales that must be sorted through when determining the veracity and accuracy of a given story. However, it also makes it entirely possible to hear a report involving the Created and not even realize that you have done so.

Due to these problems of reporting, the devoted golem hunter must ever concern himself with analyzing and evaluating reports and stories to determine if one of the Created might be responsible. Nine times out of ten,

there will be nothing but gossip or entirely human atrocities behind a report, but occasionally such a story will lead you to one of the fell creatures you seek.

My dear Astonby,

Just a few short days ago, I attended a party hosted by the noted philanthropist Simon Tolliver. I expected an evening of idle entertainment, as per chance I was not in pursuit of any foul creature. Before the evening was out, that had changed.

One of the guests, a young man by the name of Jeffrey, had just arrived from the town of Devering. He told of the recent unexplained wave of disappearances among the young women of the town. Apparently, the investigators were at a total loss until two nights ago, when the body of a young woman was found lying on the road, underneath the shattered window of her bedchamber. It seemed that every bone in her body was broken, and there were multiple bruises around her neck.

At first, of course, one might assume the girl had simply jumped or fallen, and that her death, while tragic, was in no way linked to the disappearances of the other young women. However, upon inquiring further, I discovered the door to the dead girl's home had been literally ripped off its hinges. As a final piece of information, Jeffrey noted that some residents were claiming a hideous man-thing was traveling the streets at night, making weird gibbering sounds. Rumors abounded. The most popular? That a giant ape was somehow the culprit . . .

—Dr. Van Richten, a personal letter

Discernment

In the search for evidence that a golem is active in an area, clues generally adhere to several different patterns or themes. For ease of discussion, I have grouped these themes as follows: sightings, grave robberies, unexplained murders, and other physical evidence.

Sightings

This is clearly the most straightforward pattern of report. In such a story, at least one person actually sees the golem. However, as noted, the witness almost never calls the creature by that name. Instead, look for reports of “deformed” or “hideous” creatures with tremendous strength or powers. In particular, pay attention if a story mentions strange limbs and body parts, a horrifying visage, strange scars all over the body, or a creature made of metal, glass, and so forth. Such reports are quite likely to describe golems, particularly when they include information about a creature’s amazing powers and strength.

Grave Robberies

If ever you hear a series of reports regarding disturbed graves, missing or mutilated bodies, or peculiar disappearances, you must pay especial attention. Immediately attempt to determine whether these occurrences are still going on, or whether they appear to have ceased.

If the strange events are still occurring, you must move as rapidly as possible, for there is a reasonable chance someone is attempting to create a flesh golem and *may not yet have succeeded*. It is *always* preferable to stop the creator rather than confront his vastly more powerful creation. When hearing of such a report, it is often wise to immediately begin your investigation, even though it will probably prove to be a false alarm. The time before a golem is animated is often brief, and moving too slowly at this point may result in great tragedy for all concerned.



On the other hand, if the reports of such strange disturbances seem to have ceased, it is better to take a more cautious approach to your investigation. In all likelihood, either no golem is present, or the creature is already animate and thus extremely dangerous.

Unexplained Murders

Reports of unexplained murders, especially those of a particularly brutal nature, may also be evidence that a golem is on the rampage. When hearing such stories, try to determine whether the murderer used a weapon of some sort, or whether the attack was completed without resorting to such a device. If the attacker used a weapon of any kind, it is quite likely the killer is *not* a golem. The Created almost invariably prefer to kill using only their hands and brute physicality.

On the other hand, if the murders involve broken necks, beatings of amazing brutality, or other such extreme physical violence, one of the Created may well be the killer. In such cases, if at all possible, examine the bodies firsthand. Barring that, study the crime scenes, as you can often pick up valuable clues as to whether the deaths were caused by a golem.

Other Physical Evidence

There is, of course, other physical evidence pointing to the activities or mere existence of a golem. First and foremost is the testimony of a golem’s creator. At times the work notes, diary, or other record of a golem’s creator are discovered. Such records are invaluable for both their information on the specific golem and its powers, and on the creation of golems in general. Unfortunately, it is extremely rare to have the creator’s notes to assist you. I have seen just four such records myself—and only once did the information involve the golem I was then attempting to destroy.

As noted above, evidence of great physical destruction may also indicate golem activity.

Sometimes such destruction involves multiple deaths, as with the church destroyed by the glass golem mentioned in Chapter IV. Be on the alert for patterns in the place or type of place where the damage occurs (e.g., churches, farms, or hospices). In addition to identifying the creature, such information may later prove valuable in your hunt, as it reflects the golem's (and quite probably the creator's) particular hatreds and targets.

Investigation

Once you have decided that there is a reasonable chance that the story or report you have heard involves a golem, you must go about discovering whether or not this is actually true. Now, I want to make it clear that I am not advocating rushing off to investigate every strange tale of a lurking figure or a disappearance. But you will seldom find conclusive evidence that a golem is behind the stories without investigating personally. Therefore, you must decide whether or not the particular situation bears investigating.

Once you have committed to the investigation, you must proceed to interview all witnesses. In addition, you must carefully observe any physical damage or evidence. If possible, examine the area's official records. Look for the same indications illustrated under "Discernment," above. Be diplomatic with the local officials; they are often suspicious of outsiders and disinclined to cooperate. This will be especially true if you have no credentials of your own to present. Do not be offended by such an attitude, however, for the officers are merely trying to do their work efficiently. Your best chance at attaining their aid is to appear as professional and responsible as you can.

If your investigation does not reveal that the perpetrator has extraordinary strength, or if you fail to locate any reliable witnesses, your trail may prove false. After all, the majority of cases are in actuality the work of mere mortals, however deranged or evil.

... I thought Jeffrey's tale was definitely worth investigating, so I asked the bright young lad if he would mind my accompanying him back to Devering. He readily agreed. In fact, he even said he'd read some of my books and had often considered becoming an investigator like myself!

When we arrived at the town two days later, I immediately set to work. Jeffrey proved to be an invaluable aide, introducing me to the local investigators, as well as to several witnesses who claimed to have seen a strange figure skittering through the dark streets at night while making strange gibbering sounds.

I was able to examine the body of the unfortunate young woman who had plunged from a window. As always, the sight of a young person who had been brought to such a terrible end filled me with both sorrow and anger.

It was her body that convinced me there was a golem at work here, for not only was her neck crushed, but the attacker's left hand print was significantly smaller than the right print. This is one of the more certain indicators that a golem is at work, as such a large size differential (nearly four inches in this case) is almost never seen in nature.

By the time I turned away from the body, I had resolved to stop the malevolent monster that had stolen this woman's life so callously. Looking up, I saw my own conviction mirrored in young Jeffrey's pale face and set lips. I knew I could count on his aid as well. ...

Preparing for the Hunt

Once you have established that it is likely your enemy is indeed a golem, you must immediately gather all your resources, both mental and physical. Every preparation must be made as swiftly as possible, but not at such speed that you sacrifice quality.

Reinforcements

If you do not already have a team of skilled and brave individuals with you, now is the time to send for them! It would be the greatest of follies to

attack a golem without as trustworthy and powerful a group as you can manage assisting you.

When sending for reinforcements, be certain to include magical talent. If possible, ask at least two priests and two mages to join your group. You must always assume a high casualty rate (unfortunately perhaps as high as fifty percent or more), and a party with no magical support is almost certain to meet with a grizzly end.

... Once I had established the culprit to be some sort of flesh golem, I immediately had Jeffrey bring me pen and paper so I might send for allies to support us in our mission. Fortunately, I knew that a certain adventuring party known as the Hand was currently working in my home city of Corvia. I had worked with the Hand before and found them to be highly skilled. Most importantly, four of the group's five members were magic wielders.

Within hours of confirming the golem's existence, a hired messenger was speeding toward Corvia with my urgent missive. If all went well, the Hand would be here within the week. . . .

Research

It is imperative at this point in your mission that you learn as much as possible about the golem and, if possible, its creator. Question and re-question witnesses, read and re-read documents pertaining to golems, such as the one you now hold. Go to every site the golem was said to have attacked and search the area for clues as to the monster's abilities or weaknesses.

Forming a Hypothesis

Once you have gathered as much information as you can regarding golems in general and your foe in particular, you must take some time to hypothesize. If possible, discuss the situation with one or more of your associates; people analyze information differently, and you will surely cover more possibilities if you have assistance.

Go over the information you have and determine what type of golem you face. Any information you are certain of should be used as a springboard for your hypotheses. Additionally, it is wise to make estimations as to the possible upper extent of the golem's powers. Never assume that your foe is anything but the most powerful of creatures, for to do otherwise only places yourself and your companions at even greater risk than necessary.

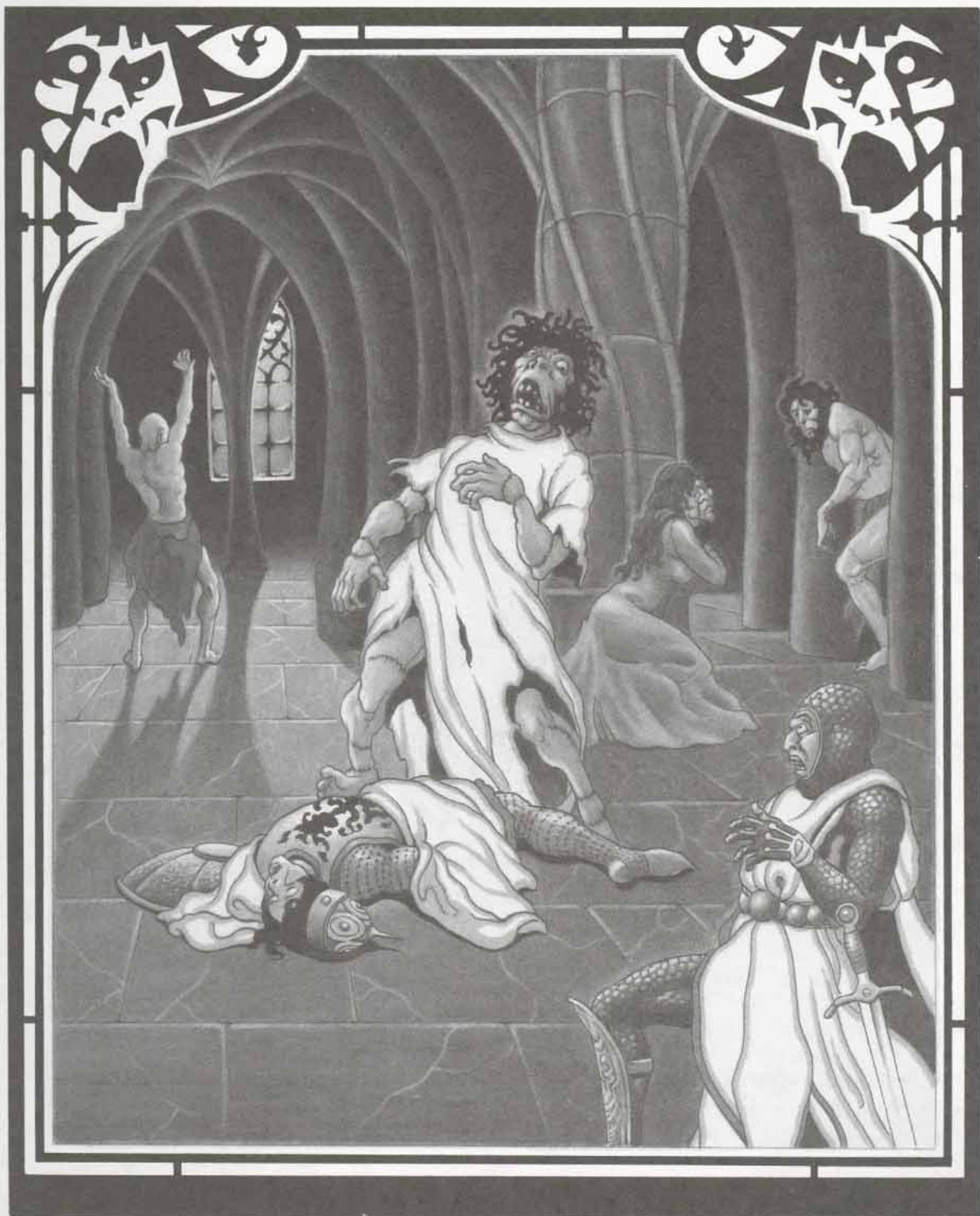
... the next few days and nights passed in a blur as Jeffrey and I pored over our extensive notes and discussed what little we knew of our foe, including where and when the thing might make its next attack. Although we knew we were at a disadvantage, we decided it was highly likely the golem would return to this town within the month. For the disappearances happened approximately once every four weeks, and there seemed to be no particular reason why the "gibbering golem," as we had come to call our enemy, should change its established pattern.

Jeffrey's intimate knowledge of the town was particularly useful; he pointed out that all the women targeted by the golem had lived or worked near the town's southeastern edge. Thus we decided that the golem probably made its lair somewhere to the southeast. I asked Jeffrey whether any buildings lay in that direction, as many flesh golems prefer to inhabit the dwellings of mankind. Jeffrey immediately told me of the asylum. A smile came over his face as he realized what a critical turning point we had reached. Now we had a place to investigate. . . .

Provisions

For any mission in which you plan to face one of the Created, it is imperative that you have the proper equipment. First and foremost, you must gather as many enchanted weapons as possible. It is inadvisable to invite anyone to accompany you in the hunt if they cannot wield such a weapon. Else, they have little chance of causing

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the golem any harm, much less of surviving, themselves.

It is also of vital importance to decide on a method of destroying the golem once you have felled the creature. The means must be swift and sure. If possible, you should form at least one contingency plan for the golem's destruction. Acid and magical fire are two good possibilities, as they both act swiftly and are harmful to the flesh golem. If you do not believe you will be able to utterly destroy the creature, then you can attempt to hack the golem's body into numerous pieces and scatter them widely. While it is true that such a dismembered golem might live to rise again later, you will at the least have removed its threat for the immediate future.

In addition to magical weapons, be certain that you have adequate first aid available to your group. Assume that some members of your hunting party will be seriously injured during the confrontation—for despite your best efforts, this is likely to occur. As noted earlier, at least one priest should accompany your hunting party. Two is an even better number. In addition, you should obtain bandages, antiseptics, and other medical paraphernalia. Finally, if at all possible, carry some magical, fast-acting medicines that anyone can administer, such as healing potions.

Reconnaissance

Unless you are already absolutely certain where the golem has established a lair, you must perform a reconnaissance mission prior to your actual attack. Such a task is best performed by two or three individuals at most—more can hardly proceed with the necessary stealth or secrecy. The risks are great at this stage. If the golem should discover those who would seek it out, blood will surely flow. (I speak, of course, of the hunters' lifeblood ebbing away, for the golem itself cannot truly bleed.)

Usually, such a reconnaissance mission is best performed at night. Be certain to remind all

involved that there is to be absolutely no contact with the golem! For this reason, it is never wise to include an inexperienced or arrogant person on this particular team.

During the mission itself, attempt to position yourselves as far as possible from the suspected lair, while still maintaining a good view. You must then be patient and observe. If you have indeed found the creature's home, the golem will almost certainly show itself at some point over the course of the evening—and if not, then over the course of the next.

It is my experience that most golems are restless, however. They tend to move around their chosen abode quite a bit, rarely staying still for long. Additionally, most reside alone, for golems are generally solitary creatures by both force and habit. Thus, if a steady stream of revelers flow from a house, it is not likely to be a golem's abode. If you do not spot your quarry the first night, I would advise watching the suspected abode for up to three or even four nights before checking closer or moving on. Once you confirm where the golem resides, you can complete your plan of attack.

... With the Hand not due to arrive in town for another two days, Jeffrey and I decided to investigate the Asylum. At first I had objected to Jeffrey's accompanying me on this delicate task, but he argued so persuasively and calmly that I relented. Besides, I had no desire to spend the night alone, and two pairs of eyes are much more efficient than one.

Our vigil lasted well through the night. Just before dawn, we spotted our foe. He came skittering out of the forest, hooting and gibbering eerily, not two hundred yards from our position. I noted the thing's blinding speed and agility as it darted toward the asylum. In the predawn light, it was difficult to discern specifics, but even my weary eyes could make out the golem's misshapen, bulging form. I could feel poor Jeffrey shuddering beside me, and I am certain it was not from the cold. Despite his obvious horror, he was completely silent and did

not flee. With the golem's lair confirmed, we returned to the town and awaited our fellows of the Hand. . . .

Planning the Assault

As your final preparation before attempting to face your enemy, you should devise a plan and be certain that every member of your party knows his or her appointed tasks. This plan should be as detailed as possible, but should by no means be rigid. The expedition's members should also attempt to talk through the various things that might go wrong during your mission so that you will be as prepared as possible, should your plan start to go awry. In addition to providing contingency plans, this sort of discussion allows the expedition members to express their concerns and renew their commitment to the mission.

In addition to the general contingency plans made, you should always have an escape plan. It is no sign of virtue to remain fighting if your current battle is a lost cause. If you do not live through the battle, you will not be able to return to complete your task. If at all possible, such an escape plan should not be contingent on any one member of the group, in case that member should fall, inadvertently trapping your entire party.

The Attack

When all is in readiness, your party armed and prepared, your plan set and reviewed, and you have gathered your resolve, it is time to face your foe. Despite your desire for a surprise attack, it is wise to make your assault during daylight hours, as you will almost assuredly be more hampered by the darkness and shadows than your foe.

Once you have set forth on your mission, move swiftly! This point is absolutely essential when fighting a golem. Throw all your power and resources into the assault immediately. If you hold back, you are surely doomed. Every

second that you face the golem brings you closer to death, for the golem is capable of doing such extreme amounts of damage that few men can withstand more than a few of its mighty blows.

You must also realize that, despite all your attempts at speed, there is a very high likelihood that your opponent will rise again before you can destroy the golem utterly.

. . . It was a brutally cold morning, especially so for Darkon in October, but the sky was clear and the sun just slipping over the horizon as we set out on our mission. The five members of the Hand were as follows: the two priestly twins, Jamillica and Serena; the elven warrior/mage Damien Lochwood; the Hand's indomitable warrior, Torus the Red; and the ever silent wizard, Corum of G'Henna. Counting myself and young Jeffrey, we were seven strong. As I looked over our group, I noticed the new blade gleaming by Jeffrey's waist, purchased just yesterday from Torus.

We proceeded to the asylum at an even pace. Entering the building was simple, for the door stood open to the elements. Proceeding cautiously, we stepped into the dank interior. My first thought was of the ruined hospices I had visited in Stangengrad. The shattered remains of bottles and jars littered the hall, and the smell of antiseptic mixed jarringly with the odor of decay. Steeling myself for the coming battle, we proceeded.

As we turning the corner of that gloomy hall, I had to grab Torus's arm; a man suddenly stood before us, and Torus was prepared to swing. But the man was no golem—though he looked to be near death. Gaunt and staring, his arms poised before him, the man stood as still as a statue. Even as we took in the sight of the catatonic fellow before us, I noticed other men, who were shuffling aimlessly about in the shadows. Obviously the golem ignored many of the asylum's now freed inmates. So far, none appeared dangerous. But I feared an encounter with a murdering madman could weaken our

party before we even met the golem, and I hoped our luck would hold.

By the time we actually encountered the golem, we were all feeling the strain of constant readiness. It did not help that we had been wandering through a maze of lunatics, dead bodies, and general filth. Before we could get our bearings, the golem came tumbling down upon us, landing on top of poor Damien's back. With a brief laugh the thing snapped the elf's neck and dropped to the floor. Then, screaming and hooting, it attacked again.

Immediately Serena began to chant, her spell of regeneration twisting and tearing at the golem's form while it battled on. As Serena's powerful prayer took effect, the intensity of the golem's hooting increased, and I could feel the terror pulling at my heart. Shaking, I saw Torus turn to flee—only to be struck down by the golem before he could run!

Moments dragged by as we struggled with all our might to deflect the golem's mighty blows. Although I knew the creature must soon fall to the power of Serena's spell, every passing second seemed an eternity, and my arms were growing leaden. . . .

Destroying the Golem

It is essential that all is in readiness for the attempted destruction of the golem. Once the golem falls, you will have an extremely brief window of opportunity to accomplish this goal.

If, for whatever reason, you do not believe you will be able to destroy the golem utterly within a few minutes of its fall, *then you must flee immediately*. If you do not, be prepared to face a fresh and unharmed foe, while your party is almost assuredly possessed of serious injuries. Fighting a golem under such conditions will inevitably result in failure, and in failing there is certain death for you and your companions.

. . . As Jeffrey blocked a final, swiping blow by the golem, the creature slumped forward—its awful, terrorizing laughter echoing in our ears. Three of my companions lay on the ground, wounded but miraculously still alive. Damien, of course, was dead. Only Serena, Jeffrey, and I had any fight left when the golem fell. Immediately, we withdrew our phials of acid. We carefully poured the contents over the creature, then stepped away from the fumes, dragging our companions to their feet. We would not know for a few minutes whether we had acted quickly enough. I bade Serena to help the others outside—and to flee, if necessary. The three of us remaining waited. I cannot tell you how deeply it shook me to see the golem's hand rise, but it seems we were just in time, as it moved no more after that.

When we were certain of its death, we burned what little remained of the gibbering golem so that there would be no chance of its being reanimated once more.

As a final note, I am happy to report that Jeffrey has joined the Hand and is currently studying to be a mage. We need such young people to take up the fight against evil, for none of us will live forever.

When the madness and terror of the fight is concluded, you must tend to the wounded and bury the dead. If you have been so fortunate and skilled to have utterly destroyed your foe, you should be very proud of your great accomplishment.

Unfortunately, this sort of total victory is a rarity when fighting the Created. So do not be chagrined if you have but temporarily driven off the creature. This too is a worthy accomplishment when faced with such a deadly foe as the golem.

As a final word to you, my readers, I wish to salute you for your dedication and sacrifice in the service of others. It is no small thing to strive to be a force of light in the face of such fiendish, burning evil as is embodied in the Created!

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Horror really can't be talked about because it's alive, because it's mute and goes on growing: memory-wounding pain drips by day, drips in sleep.

—George Seferis,
Last Stop

Seferis's quote captures an important quality of horror and the horrible. What is truly horrifying cannot be conveyed by mere words. In the face of our worst nightmares, language

fails us. We are stripped of all civilized conventions,

of our secure knowledge of what can and cannot be, and we are left alone, incapable of trusting what we have always relied on.

Golems are horrifying creatures on many levels, not the least of which is their strange parody of humanity. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the villagers see a hideous monster and immediately leap to the conclusion that it is a monstrous being both inside and out. At first this may not be the case, but as the monster is rejected again and again by those it meets, as Dr. Frankenstein fights to control it body and soul, the monster indeed becomes what the villagers have condemned it to be: a creature of irrefutable evil.

The Created's closeness to ourselves brings the horror into our very laps. It is difficult to ignore or escape. In the movie *Halloween*, a murderous child known as Michael Myers returns to his placid middle-class suburban neighborhood to wreak mindless, unstoppable violence on the teens living there, and he does so with unnerving calm. (Myers is the prototype of a new wave of Hollywood golems that includes Jason and Chuckie.) At the end of the

movie, despite the best efforts of the film's heroine, and despite the fact that he should have been dead many times over, Michael disappears into the darkness.

There is no reasoning with golems, no understanding their true nature. They do seem to have a perverse understanding of us, however. Still, this understanding never leads to compassion. Rather, it only imbues the golem with a greater capacity for tracking and tormenting its victims.

Golems are the true bogeymen of the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting. They are the creatures lurking under the bed, the things that go bump in the night. When a golem is handled to its best advantage during play, no other monster can equal the sheer heart-stopping terror it creates in a campaign.

Golem Adventures

There are four basic elements of particular importance to golem adventures:

obsession, terror, intimacy, and tragedy.

The whole tenor of an adventure can change by focusing upon a particular element or elements. For instance, using Dr. Van Richten's gibbering golem as an example, if the DM focuses on the tragic situation of the creature, born into a chaotic world with only the insane for company, desperately searching for a soul mate, the PCs may see their mission as one of release: freeing the gibbering golem from its mad and doomed existence. However, if the relentlessness of the golem is the focus of the scenario, the PCs may well begin to think *they* are mad as effort after effort fails to stop the horrid thing that laughs at them from the shadows and seems to be waiting around every corner, behind every door.

Before a Dungeon Master begins to work on a scenario involving golems, each of these four elements should be considered and their importance to the particular story determined. By taking just a little extra time and effort, the DM can provide the players with a scenario that is not just scary, but magnificently horrifying.

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Obsession

Almost without exception, the creation of an intelligent golem in Ravenloft involves obsession. Only through the obsessive drive of its creator can such a golem achieve life. Would-be creators who lack this obsession simply never succeed. As with Dr. Mordenheim, the creator of Lamordia's lord, the golem Adam, even the most driven creators will usually only have a single success.

Obsession, as both a creative and destructive force, is an integral element of any golem scenario. The DM may use a creator's obsession to show the PCs the danger of such all-consuming drive. The creator reaches his goal, but at a horrible expense.

Conversely, in order for a party to defeat a golem, they must give up a great deal and devote their energies almost obsessively to the task at hand. The DM can easily slip in an encounter or two where the PCs must choose between temporarily backing down or sacrificing their principles to more easily reach their goal.

Obsession is purpose without balance. It involves an inability to see any viewpoint save one's own. Such a powerful emotion can create great good, pushing people to new heights they thought were unattainable. However, it can also become an end in and of itself.

Shakespeare often used obsessive characters as villains in his tragedies. Lady Macbeth would stop at nothing to gain power and position. Both golems and their creators are consumed by obsessions, and through these monsters we see our own faults grown to epic proportions.

Terror

The golem is the ultimate bogeyman. It is an unrelenting foe, seemingly unstoppable. This element of primal terror is particularly relevant to scenarios involving the Created.

From the time we are children, we fear what we do not understand. Even more frightening is the enemy we cannot reason with or have power

over. Golems are just such foes. Vampires, werewolves, and other classic monsters walk among us (at least at times), speak with us, and participate in society to an extent. All may share a particular Achilles heal, such as sunlight for the vampire, or the silver bullet for the werewolf. But golems do not participate in human society. And golem hunters have no fool-proof weapon at their disposal.

Many players participate in a RAVENLOFT® campaign because they enjoy the fear it inspires within them. It's the same reason we visit haunted houses, tell ghost stories, and watch horror films. We like to be scared (at least through imaginary situations). For the DM, a golem is an ideal monster to just plain "scare the bejeezes" out of their players. For such thrill-seeking players, not much can top the horror of being certain you have destroyed your enemy—only to see it rise up again, good as new. After this has happened more than once, even hardened adventurers may be jumping at shadows and flinching away from every unexplained noise.

Intimacy

A common theme in gothic horror is the intimate situation—a comforting familiarity with a person or place that leads characters to drop their guards despite impending danger. In a golem adventure, characters should find themselves in a situation marked by such comforting familiarity. The Created often seek out human civilization and haunt its edges, sometimes yearning for acceptance, other times merely looking for prey. Thus, even the most familiar setting can be the site of a golem scenario. But even if the PCs are in a strange town, they might still find a warm inn or a friendly tavern. When violence and fear strike in such comforting surroundings, the result is far more confusing and horrifying than, say, being attacked while crossing an orc tribe's turf.

As noted, an intimate situation may involve familiar people as well as places. For example,

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perhaps the golem's creator has stolen the animating spirit from someone the PCs know and care for. While the group may realize this awful truth at first, the golem may retain certain memories about the party and use the information against them. For example, if a character's mother has been ill, the golem might leave crude notes asking whether she has recovered.

Such a golem is particularly appropriate for the role of a recurring enemy. All golems make excellent recurring foes, of course, due to their power and regenerative abilities. But a creature whose spirit was linked to the PCs both before and after animation can add a neatly macabre note to confrontations. And having a PC wake to discover some evidence that a former acquaintance laid beside him in the night—when the PC had no idea that character was even in the area let alone still alive—can be as intimately horrifying as the kiss of the succubus. Of course, as the PCs soon discover, that former acquaintance will most certainly have changed for the worse.

Even more intimate and horrifying is discovering that a member of one's own adventuring party has been placed within the body of a golem. Such adventures approach their peak of horror as the golem PC rapidly begins to lose control, and his friends attempt to reverse the terrible transplantation before it is too late. This type of adventure is extremely tricky to run, however. Pacing and balance are critical. To maintain effective tension, the DM must emphasize the golem PC's gradual loss of identity and control (which is the true horror), while still allowing the party some hope of saving the PC. If this balance can be struck correctly, however, you can be sure your players will talk about this adventure for a long time to come.

Tragedy

Although golems are creatures of darkness, they are also creatures of great tragedy. As noted in Chapter II, a golem may be animated by the life force stolen from another living being.

During the course of its "kidnapping," the spirit becomes warped. However, it still maintains some idea of its former self, some memory of who it once was. The doomed spirit, twisted by the malignant obsessions of its creator, is evil and must be destroyed. The heart of the golem's tragic existence lies in both the tiny shred of humanity forever trapped within the golem's body and in the golem's initial doomed attempts to reach out to others from its utter isolation.

Frankenstein's monster is an excellent example of the doomed creation of a mad scientist. The creature yearns for companionship, acceptance, and even love, but its true nature can never allow the monster to attain these goals. Struggling and raging against its creator, its own nature, and the world that rejects it, Frankenstein's monster is a study in tragedy.

The golem's creator can also be portrayed as a tragic figure. With only minor modifications in the case history Dr. Van Richten presented in the last chapter, Fressen could be seen as a tragic figure. If his cold and disapproving father had murdered Danalie and then sent the grieving and shocked Fressen to the asylum, his story would truly be tragic and his creation of the golem "Father" seen as a pathetic attempt at finding love and acceptance himself.

The tremendous amount of destruction and loss of life can also bring a great deal of tragedy into the adventure. If the PCs must ride into a small village rent asunder by a golem, only to find a few children left alive of all the village's residents, or a mother sobbing over her dead child, they should certainly be moved by such a scene.

Techniques of Terror

When portraying golems in an adventure, it can be wise to pick up some tricks from horror novels and films. In general, think about what books or movies you find scary and then ask yourself *why* they scare you. Often, when a person is asked to think of what particular event scares him, he cites something along these lines: A monster jumps out of a

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closet at the hero. But what they actually found scariest was the tension as the hero walked through the house. Knowing that there is a monster out there *somewhere* is much scarier than simply having it stand before you. When the monster comes out from under the bed, you can at least attack.

Gothic horror relies heavily upon the fear of the unknown. Golems are an ideal way to bring this sort of terror into a RAVENLOFT® campaign. They are inscrutable, they are evil personified, and they are out there somewhere. Maintaining this sense of uncertainty and imminent danger is one of the best ways of putting a party on edge.

Here's another method of enhancing the fear caused by a golem: Never let the PCs get a good look at their foe until the final confrontation. While playing the role of NPCs, arrange for a few horrified witnesses to mumble about "those terrible, terrible eyes" or some such. Let the PCs see the devastation wrought by the creature. When the heroes arrive on the scene of such destruction, time the adventure so they're only a few moments too late, again and again, though they may catch a glimpse of the fleeting creature. In short, allow the players' own imaginations to do some of your work for you. After all, each of us has our own particular fears, and the images they conjure in our minds are those which horrify us the most.

The movie *Alien* provides an excellent example of this visual restraint. Ripley and the other crew members of their space freighter first see the young alien as it emerges from a crew member's stomach (killing him in the process). The viewer shares their horror as the victim's stomach bulges and pulses, yet the creature itself is seen only fleetingly. Then the crew members know an alien is aboard their ship, but they can find only its trail—the skin that it sheds as it grows and grows. One by one, the crew members are picked off and eaten; still, we are granted little more than a glimpse of the attacker. (This film is also an excellent example of utilizing more than just sight to create horror and suspense. Sound, touch, smell, and taste

are all important senses and should not be ignored when describing both your monster and the surroundings the PCs are in.)

Another means of making the Created truly terrifying is to emphasize their relentlessness. This quality is best conveyed through extremes: a golem displaying primal levels of emotion and destruction, or a golem that exhibits a complete absence of these qualities. In the latter case, for example, the enemy may walk at the same, deliberate pace, no matter what its victims do or how fast they run. This can be vastly more frightening than a golem who performs the pell-mell attack typical of many monsters. After all, a creature who feels no need to hurry must be confident in its eventual success. This technique is especially effective when the PCs are on the run. The use of a recurrent golem foe (as discussed above under *intimacy*) can also be an excellent device for wearing at the PCs' nerves and causing them to feel always on the alert.

A final method that often proves effective in provoking fear is a horror movie stand-by that goes something like this: Create tension (Billy sneaks through the gymnasium trying to escape the monster he knows is out there), then create a shock (suddenly a dark figure looms up behind Billy), which turns out to be a false alarm (it's only Billy's goofy friend, Eddie, wondering what Billy's doing), and *then* spring the real shock on the relaxed audience (now the monster strikes!).

Of course, some players are hard sells, and if all your techniques to cause horrified and fearful reactions in your players fail, you can resort to using fear and horror checks. But it is infinitely more fun for all concerned if the PCs are actually scared and horrified.

Creating New Golems

Imagine you've decided which elements of horror you'd like to emphasize during your adventure, and have begun to develop a story line. You've decided who is attempting to create

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a golem and why. Now it's time to determine the exact nature of the golem, the malevolent heart of your story. The methods outlined below will help you create a unique monster especially suited to your campaign.

Using the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®

The simplest and quickest method of creating a new golem is to consult the golem entries in the *Monstrous Manual* and the RAVENLOFT® appendix to the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®. Even though these golems are automatons created by wizards and priests, as opposed to intelligent creatures born of an obsession, the descriptions can still provide a useful springboard.

In any case, start by considering the golem's creator. Is he (or she) a blacksmith, for example? Or a tinker? Consult the entry for the golem variety that best suits the creator and your story line (such as iron for the blacksmith and mechanical for the tinker).

Even using this sort of shortcut, you can create a unique golem. In fact, it's always a good idea to adjust the standard creature a bit so that your PCs must remain on their toes, not knowing exactly what type of enemy they face. Uncertainty will add excitement, fear, and mystery to your adventure.

During play, be careful not to make a pronouncement like this: "It looks like a flesh golem." Such a statement completely deflates what is otherwise a dramatic moment: the moment the PCs see their foe. Instead, *describe* the hideous, lumbering humanoid with a lopsided face, sagging skin, and huge hands, smelling faintly of blood and decay, or a fiendish creature that leaps from a rooftop and lands before the PCs as deftly as a cat. This kind of description prevents the players from recognizing the creature and immediately making a mental roster of its combat abilities.

When you've created a golem based on a standard type, it's especially important to

prolong some of the mystery about that creature during play. One of the golem's main strengths is its resiliency. If the PCs are unaware of the exact nature of their enemy, they will be extremely shocked when the golem rises up from "death," apparently unharmed.

Starting from Scratch

This method for building a new golem takes more time, but the results will reflect that effort. You'll have complete control over your creation, and can tailor the golem to your exact specifications.

Earlier in this book, Van Richten presented common traits, vulnerabilities, and extraordinary powers of golems. These can serve as a guidelines for your new creature. Consider the information to be suggestions only; it is not intended to be a rigid system of inflexible rules. The purpose of this book is to open up possibilities and expand the options of you, the DM, not to limit your creativity.

When building golems from scratch, remember how powerful these monsters are. Be careful to balance the golem's special abilities with at least a few vulnerabilities. It is a delicate task to create a monster that appears nearly unstoppable, but is also a monster the PCs have a chance of defeating. The gibbering golem described by Dr. Van Richten is an example of a golem "created from scratch."

PC Golems

If your story calls for the spirit of an NPC to be planted in the body of a golem, plotting the adventure is relatively easy. But what happens if a player character is the victim? This potentially dramatic twist poses special challenges. Certainly, the desperate fight to save the PC is the stuff of great adventure. However, becoming a golem must in no way benefit the PC.

In most cases, a golem's animating force, or spirit, has only the fragmented memory of its

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former self, and then only briefly. However, if your story calls for a PC's spirit to be transferred to a golem body, then the personality of the character should remain intact for a short time. This allows the PC and his friends a window of opportunity in which to save the unfortunate character. Bear in mind, however, that the sudden disruption of changing bodies is *always* followed by the deterioration of the PC's mind and personality as he rapidly becomes a creature of Ravenloft.

The section below explains how long a PC's spirit may inhabit a golem before this atrocity is irreversible (and the player must abandon his or her role). It also describes what happens to a PC's personality and abilities when he becomes a golem. You may wish to devise your own methods of golem animation, but the following guidelines should provide a springboard for your imagination.

The Energy Surge

As noted in Chapter II, a powerful surge of energy binds a spirit to the golem's body. When that surge occurs, the PC must make a system shock check. If he fails this check, his body dies during the transfer of the spirit, and the player must immediately give control of his character to you, the DM. The player should then create a new character, for the old one is permanently lost, trapped within its new golem body.

On the other hand, if the system shock roll is successful, the PC finds himself a golem. Within 2 to 24 (2d12) hours, the character will remember his true identity, although he will only have hazy memories of his transformation. He will have an acute sense of physical power, however—a power derived from his new form.

Brain Transplants

An adventure in which the physical brain of a player character is placed within the body of a golem offers an even more extreme plot twist. This ploy should only be used if you feel the PCs will have some chance, however slim, of restoring their comrade to his original state. There is an added difficulty, as the PC's body almost assuredly (barring extreme magical measures such as the use of a *time stop* spell or the like) actually dies during the physical operation. The death of the character's body makes it that much more difficult for his companions to restore the unfortunate PC. In any case, the PC must make a successful system shock roll to survive. (See "Reversing the Transformation" on page 94 for more information.)

Changes by Class

When the mind and personality of a PC enter the body of a golem, the character's abilities can change dramatically. These effects are explained below. Of course, the normal changes first imposed on PCs when they entered the dark lands of Ravenloft are still in effect.

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Warriors: Save for the tremendous strength of the warrior's adopted golem body, the change does not significantly affect the PC's abilities. However, if the warrior utilizes this prodigious strength (or any of the other abilities of his new form) in combat, the character will find himself that much further from salvation (see "Effects on Personality," below).

Paladins: When a paladin enters the land of the mists, he can no longer use many of his special abilities. The transference into the body of a golem strips away almost all of the paladin's remaining powers. The paladin cannot successfully discover whether a being is chaotic while in the new body, nor can he heal himself or others while in golem form.

The paladin does, however, receive one small boon: He is no longer detectable by the lord of the domain. Further, he retains the ability to turn undead. However, any attempt to do so suffers a -4 penalty due to the increased difficulty the paladin has at focusing his willpower and faith while in the golem body. If the paladin ever uses one of the golem's many abilities, or when he inevitably begins to be corrupted by his new form, he suffers an alignment change and loses all the special abilities of his class (see "Effects On Personality," below). In order to regain the paladin's abilities and alignment, the character must (at a minimum) embark on a holy quest.

Rangers: Rangers completely lose their animal empathy while in the body of a golem. Animals can sense the unnaturalness of the ranger's new form and instinctively shy away. If the ranger has any animal followers, they too will avoid their master. The animals will have no idea what has happened to the ranger. It is entirely possible they'll think the character has died and then move on. If the ranger regains his own body, the animals will return, provided they're still in the area.

Wizards: When placed within the body of a golem, a wizard immediately loses all ability to cast spells. Although the character retains the knowledge necessary to work magic, the body

and brain of a golem are incapable of channeling the necessary energies. Try as he might, the wizard cannot master magic of any sort until he is returned to his own body.

If the wizard has a familiar, the character may well lose that companion forever. The familiar itself runs a risk of dying from the psychological shock of the character's transfiguration. When a wizard becomes a golem, the player should roll a saving throw vs. death for the animal. If the check is successful, the familiar survives. If not, the result is fatal.

However, even if the poor familiar survives the initial trauma, it will remain in a state of shock and attempt to flee the area. If the familiar is not stopped, chances are it will never be seen again, and any remaining bond between the mage and the animal will dissolve. However, if the familiar is somehow kept in the area and the wizard is restored to his normal body, the wizard can attempt once, and only once, to restore the bond. In order to do so, the mage must again cast the *find familiar* spell. If successful, the mage will regain the bond with his familiar.

If the above method fails, however, the familiar will view the mage as dangerous and will make every attempt to flee. It will never again be the wizard's familiar, and the wizard's powers are as affected as if the familiar had died.

Priests: Like a paladin, a priest who is placed in the body of a golem finds it extremely difficult to focus his faith and willpower. Thus, attempts at turning the undead incur a -4 penalty. This penalty is in addition to any other penalties the priest may suffer due to other conditions in Ravenloft.

The priest's spellcasting abilities are also affected. While in a golem body, the priest can cast no spells above 3rd level. Additionally, the base chance of spell failure is 50%. For every point of Wisdom over 12, the percentage is reduced by 5. Thus, a priest with a Wisdom of 15 has a 35% chance of spell failure while in a golem body.

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TABLE 8: Timetable for Personality Dissolution

Mental State ▼	Wisdom 3–4	Wisdom 5–7	Wisdom 8–10	Wisdom 11–12	Wisdom 13–14	Wisdom 15–16	Wisdom 17–18
<i>Intact</i>	1 day	1 day	1 day	2 days	2 days	3 days	3 days
<i>Dominant</i>	2 days	3 days	5 days	6 days	8 days	9 days	10 days
<i>Balanced</i>	2 days	4 days	6 days	7 days	8 days	9 days	11 days
<i>Faint</i>	2 days	2 days	2 days	3 days	3 days	4 days	4 days
<i>Golem</i>	8th day	11th day	15th day	19th day	22nd day	26th day	29th day

Notes: First, locate the column for the PC's Wisdom. The text in that column describes the length of time spent in each mental state. Each time the PC uses any golem power, Wisdom is reduced by –1 for purposes of determining rate of personality decay. If the PC's brain was **transplanted** into the golem body, add 1 day to the duration of each stage.

Rogues: If a rogue is placed in a golem's body, his abilities change to match the physical traits of the new form. However, unless the body has exceptionally dexterous digits and limbs, the rogue will suffer a penalty to any skills requiring finesse (e.g., lock picking, picking pockets). This penalty normally ranges from –10% to –50%. It is up to the DM to determine the specific penalties involved.

In addition to suffering the penalties just noted, a bard in the body of golem can no longer utilize any of his magical abilities, including the ability to charm. Further, like the wizard, he cannot cast spells.

Effects on Personality

During the initial hours following a player character's transfer to a golem body, he becomes acquainted with the amazing strength of his new form. However, while power is gained, much is at stake: The transfer to golem form puts the character squarely on the path to becoming a creature of Ravenloft, in mind as well as body.

As the DM, you should describe in vivid detail the character's newfound physical prowess and abilities. However, if the character ever uses these abilities—the abilities of an inherently

monstrous form—the inevitable dissolution of the character's personality occurs more swiftly.

Any time the PC uses a golem ability, you should make a powers check for that character (see the *Realm of Terror* booklet of the RAVENLOFT® campaign set for a description of this check). The base chance of attracting the attention of dark forces of the demiplane should be roughly 10%. Feel free to vary this chance based on how and why the character has used his abilities. (For example, if he was saving a small child from harm, the chance might only be 5%, but if the PC used his powers for personal gain, the percentage should be much higher.) The "Oaths of Evil" booklet in the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set offers more advice for adjudicating PC actions and resulting powers checks.

If the PC fails a powers check, make a note of it. Later, if the PC is successfully returned to his own body, describe the effects of that failure. These checks are cumulative. Thus, it is entirely possible for an incautious PC to find himself a creature of Ravenloft—i.e., an NPC—even as he thinks he has been saved.

This descent into darkness leads only to stage five of the powers check progression: The PC *will not* reach stage six through any actions the PC golem takes, and thus will not become a lord

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of a domain. Instead, once a PC golem has failed five powers checks, actions that would otherwise require further checks merely cause his personality to dissolve at even greater speed.

In particular, for every powers check “skipped,” the PC golem’s personality immediately shifts to the next level of dissolution shown on Table 8. Thus, a PC whose personality was in the *balanced* category before the evil act would decline to *faint*, thereby coming one step closer to total personality loss and NPC status.

Unfortunately for the poor PC, even if he refrains from using the dark abilities of his new body, he merely keeps alive for a brief while longer the slim hope of returning to his former self. The amount of time a PC has before he becomes an NPC is based on the character’s Wisdom and whether or not his brain was transplanted into the golem’s body. Characters who’ve undergone such a transplant tend to retain their own personalities for a slightly greater period of time, as more of their “true self” inhabits the body.

Stages of Dissolution

Table 8 shows how many days elapse before a PC’s personality disintegrates and he is forever lost. This disintegration is marked by five stages: intact, dominant, balanced, faint, and golem. Consult the column corresponding to the character’s Wisdom. Anytime the PC uses the powers of his new form, however, his Wisdom is reduced by 1 point for purposes of determining the rate of the character’s decline.

The text below defines each of the five stages of personality dissolution. This information should be shared with the player trapped in the golem body, so he can attempt to role-play accordingly. If the player does not do so, however, feel free to have the PC make both fear and horror checks as he slowly feels himself losing control.

Intact: The PC’s personality is essentially unchanged at this first stage. However, the PC

should certainly be horrified by his situation and behave accordingly.

Dominant: Minor changes occur in the PC’s personality. Although the PC is still in charge, tell the character he feels angry, moody, and hurt over minor incidents that would normally not bother him at all.

Balanced: At this point, the PC is truly caught up in the struggle to control his personality. No matter what the PC’s original alignment was, it now becomes chaotic due to the PC’s inner turmoil. Tell the PC he feels great confusion and strange desires, and that he is beginning to feel his control slipping away. The PC’s mood begins to swing even more erratically than before.

Faint: By this point the PC has lost almost all of his original personality. The golem personality has gained the upper hand, and you should only allow the player to take the role of the PC only for brief intervals. At other times, you should control the PC, treating him as a young golem.

Golem: The PC has now lost his struggle and is a golem in every sense. The player has lost a character, for the golem is an NPC.

The Inner Struggle

While the PC is within the golem body, the character is in a constant struggle to maintain control of both his mind and body. Such a struggle is intense, and any sort of conflict or surprise can cause the PC to lose his grip, even if only for a short while. Even something so small as another party member or an NPC disagreeing with the PC golem may cause the PC to lose control.

Whenever violence of *any* kind occurs, when anyone disagrees strongly with the words or actions of the PC golem, or when the PC golem is surprised, consult Table 9 to determine whether the PC maintains control. (Find the row corresponding to the character’s personality

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TABLE 9: PC Golem Self-Control

Personality	—Roll 1d6—					
Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
Intact	A	A	A	B	C	D
Dominant	A	A	B	B	C	D
Balanced	A	B	C	C	D	D
Faint	B	C	C	D	D	D

Key

- A) PC remains in control of actions.
- B) PC flees scene for 1d4 rounds.
- C) PC attacks nearest nonparty member(s); regains senses in 1d10 rounds.
- D) PC loses control and attacks anything in sight for 1d10 rounds.

state, then roll 1d6 to find the column listing the PC's reaction.) As the DM, you may also make this "self-control" check whenever you deem it appropriate.

Reversing the Transformation

The methods for restoring a PC golem to his rightful body vary according to the manner in which the character's life essence was originally transferred: through a surge of energy, or a through a brain transplant.

The Energy Surge: In this case, those who conduct the reverse transfer must possess both bodies: the character's own and the golem's. They must then utilize some sort of powerful energy charge again. The amount of power required is a matter for you, the DM, to decide. However, this reversal definitely calls for some effort and planning on the part of the PCs. The most important factor to consider is what type of quest you and your players will most enjoy. Several possible scenarios are outlined below. Whatever the method, however, when the reversal is attempted, the character must make a successful system shock roll. If the PC fails this check, the character and both bodies die.

- The party sets up a "Dr. Frankenstein" style laboratory (or uses the creator's lab, if he had one). Lightning is harnessed to create the necessary energy surge.

- The adventurers become detectives, hunting in old libraries and ancient ruins to rediscover ancient alchemical formulae. One of these concoctions, when swallowed, frees the spirit to return to its body, while the second forces a spirit to leave its current form.

- The party uncovers information regarding a legendary magical pool that will reverse such a terrible transformation, provided both bodies are placed within it. Or perhaps they discover a legendary portal, and both bodies must be sent through it. This type of storyline can be used to send the party on an urgent quest in which they must fight against both time and any obstacles the DM places in their way to save their companion.

- The bizarre magical item known as the *Apparatus* may also be used to place a PC in the body of a golem or to replace the PC in his original body. (See the campaign set, *Realm of Terror*, for more information on the *Apparatus*.)

Transplantation: For obvious reasons, both bodies must be on hand to attempt a reverse transplantation of the brain. The procedure is complicated by two factors: the physical operation needed and the (probable) physical death of the PC's body.

The operation must be performed quickly, and a *heal* spell must be cast on the PC's own body at the moment the brain is replaced. The PC must make a successful system shock roll to survive this surgery.

If the PC's original body is dead, a *resurrection* spell must also be employed immediately following the *heal* spell. However, if the PC's body has been kept alive somehow, this second step is unnecessary. If the operation is successfully completed before the PC's personality has deteriorated (see Table 8), the PC will be restored.

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Lasting Effects

Even if a PC golem is successfully restored to his original human or demihuman state, he still bears the scars of this horrendous experience. Recovery from such trauma is slow, and it may never be complete.

The text below describes the lingering effects of such a reversal. The damage incurred depends on how long the PC was trapped in the golem body. Effects are cumulative, so a PC who reached the “balanced” stage mentally receives all the ill effects of the earlier stages as well as the effects noted for the balanced stage.

Intact: The PC automatically suffers the effects of a failed horror check.

Dominant: The PC's Charisma score is reduced by 2 points due to mood swings and difficulty relating to others. Such the moodiness and resulting loss of Charisma last from one to four (1d4) months.

Balanced: The PC loses one experience level due to extensive memory loss.

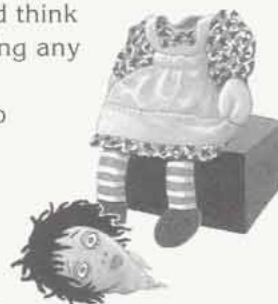
Faint: The PC suffers from a *split personality*. In times of great stress (DM discretion), the PC's “dark side” may emerge and take control. The PC must make a Wisdom check with a -2 penalty to avoid slipping into his secondary personality.

If the PC does change personalities, he comes under the control of the DM for a period of one to four (1d4) turns. When the PC recovers from one of these episodes, he will remember nothing of that time period. This effect can only be cured by *heal*, *wish*, or a similar spell.

A Final Caution

As the DM, you should think carefully before creating any PC golems in your campaigns. Players do not like having their characters manhandled, especially when such treatment results in the death of

their favorite character! However, you may wish to utilize the unique element of personal horror that a PC golem adds to a RAVENLOFT® campaign. Seeing your friend struggle to control an alien and evil body (or having a character in such a position), and managing to save the individual is truly a heroic task. If the PCs should fail in their task, knowing the hideous creature who is now their enemy was once a valued companion should horrify party members. Whenever a PC realizes he is confronting a golem that was once a friend, the PC must make both fear and horror checks.



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Average
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic neutral or evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	9 (40 hp)
THACO:	11
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 (fists)
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2d8/2d8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Strangulation
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (7'-8' tall)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	5,000

The madman who fashions a flesh golem must harvest its parts from at least six corpses: one for each limb, another for the head and torso, and yet another for the creature's brain. Most creators use an even larger collection of parts. For instance, the eyes may be drawn from one body, while the hands come from another. The result, sewn into a scarred mass, is always ghastly. While individual golems vary in appearance, none has the flat head and neck bolts common to old horror movies.

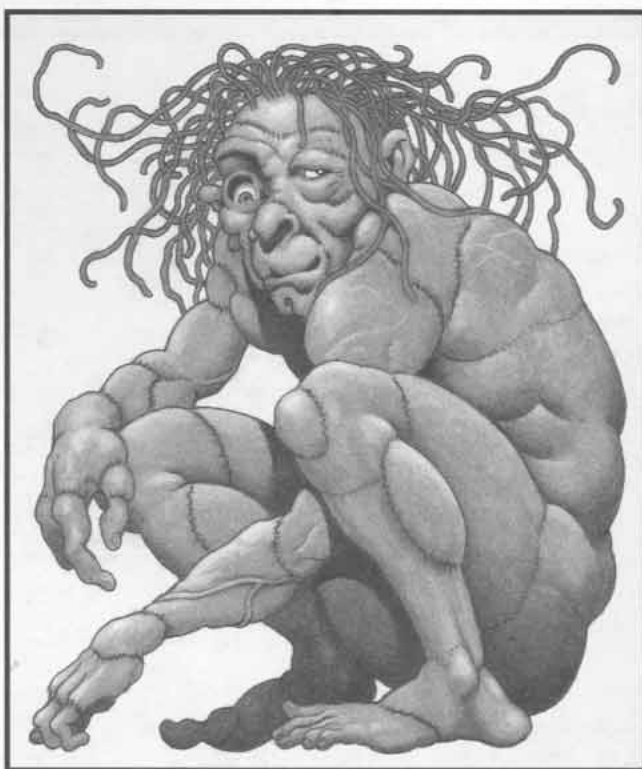
Combat: The Ravenloft flesh golem is made of strangely "living" tissue, but its body is highly resilient. While fire and acid cause normal damage, nonmagical weapons cannot penetrate its skin; only weapons of +1 or greater enchantment can strike it. Attacks from monsters of at least 4 + 1 Hit Dice also harm the golem (PCs don't qualify).

The flesh golem is immune to all cold and electrical attacks. (Note that electricity does not regenerate hit points, as it does for the flesh golems created in other campaign worlds.) The Ravenloft flesh golem is also immune to toxins, disease, and any attack that involves a biological function alien to the creature—in particular breathing, resting, or aging.

Most spells do not affect the golem. It cannot be teleported. It is immune to all mind-affecting magic, such as *charm person* and *sleep*. However, it cannot automatically detect invisible creatures or see through illusions, unless the corresponding magic is cast directly upon the golem (e.g., *phantasmal killer*).

Excluding cold or electrical attacks, magical assaults that cause a loss of hit points can harm the golem. However, it gains a +4 bonus to its saving throw against such attacks. While failure means it incurs damage, most other spell effects are ignored. This applies only to spells cast directly upon the golem, including those with an area effect. It does not include "side effects." For example, if a *wall of stone* falls on a golem, the golem does not eliminate the wall with its touch. The golem is also vulnerable to *wish*, *limited wish*, and level-draining attacks (though it always gets a +4 saving throw bonus to avoid a loss of hit points).

The golem has a special attack, which it can use when it pleases. If it strikes with both fists in the same round, it can begin strangling its victim during the next round. Strangulation causes 3d8 points of damage each round—automatically. The victim cannot escape unless he has a Strength of 19 or greater. It is possible for two people to break the



golem's grip (one on each arm), provided each person has a Strength of at least a 17.

The Ravenloft flesh golem boasts unique regenerative powers. It recovers 1 hit point an hour, whether or not it is resting. If its hit points drop below 0, the creature ceases to heal. The body is not dead, however, merely incapacitated. The mind is unconscious. If at least 50% of the creature's parts remain intact, the golem can be stitched and repaired. If it then receives a bolt of electricity, it reawakens, fully restored.

Only fire and acid can permanently destroy the body of the flesh golem. Anything less, and the creature may be reanimated at a later date. Fire is also harmful indirectly; the golem fears it. Unless it makes a successful fear check (save vs. paralyzation), it must remain at least 10 feet from small flames (e.g., cooking fires, torches) and at least 25 feet from larger flames (e.g., bonfires, many torches together). Even a lit match may anger it, though no check is required. The fear check number for flesh golems is 12 (the usual number is 8, but a -4 penalty is imposed). If a golem is forced too close to a flame, consult the fear check results table in the RAVENLOFT® campaign set to determine the creature's reaction.

Habitat/Society: Ravenloft flesh golems are fashioned by madmen—from scientists to artisans—and given life by the mysterious forces of the demiplane. They live as hermits and long to be accepted by mankind, though most are too evil or insane to fit in. The inevitable rejection they suffer leads to a deep hatred of living creatures, especially humans and demihumans. Most eventually murder their creators.

The animating spirit belongs to the brain used to make the golem, or that of another creature transferred into it. This spirit is usually warped in the process, however. Therefore, it's much more primitive and childlike, and may retain very little memory of its former existence.

Ecology: Flesh golems have no meaningful place in the environment.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons[®]
2nd Edition



Van Richten's Guide to the Created

*... by the glimmer of the half-extinguished
light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the
creature open; it breathed hard, and a
convulsive motion agitated its limbs.*
—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Armed with satchel and saw, the creator
slips into the night. He seeks the freshly
dug grave and the unguarded morgue,
selecting each body part with care. In the
twilight before dawn, he tailors a perfect
form, seeing no fault in the livid flesh or the
crude black stitching. Creating a new life is
his sole obsession—yet the thing he creates
brings only misery and death.

The golems of Ravenloft boast powers
unseen in other realms, for they are shaped
by the demiplane's mysterious forces. Join
Dr. Van Richten as he exposes the evil that
is the Created. Learn his theories on
construction and animation, and discover
his hard-won notes on the golem's
phenomenal strength. Heed well his sage
advice, for whether their parts are human
or otherwise, the Created are cunning and
relentless foes, rising again and again from
apparent death. Only with the knowledge
herein can a hunter utterly destroy such a
monster, until nothing but ashes and
nightmares remain.

96 pages—Recommended for All Character Levels

By Teeuwynn Woodruff

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